水城正太郎 みずきしょうたろう

『東京タブロイド』シリーズ（富士見ミステリー文庫）、『せんすいかん』シリーズ（ＨＪ文庫）。『ホビー・データ』を経て、現在ライター集団『Ａ－ＴＥＡＭ』主催。広島カープファンなのですが、最近は横浜ベイスターズに詳しくなってきました。本気のファンには申し訳ないが、豪快な負けっぷりが素敵なのです。ノーヒットで４点とられたりして魔法みたいに負けるんだぜ！　びっくりするほどベイスターズ！

伊藤宗一 いとうそういち

兵庫県在住のイラストレーター兼漫画家。
一般向けから成年向けまで幅広く活動中。
好物は、熱血・筋肉・萌え・エロ・爺。
<一言>
一般誌で何という物を描かせるんですか！
それはさておき、秋田書店様よりコミックス版『いちばんうしろの大魔王①』発売中です。よろしくお願いします。

カバーイラスト／伊藤宗一　装丁／西村 大

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ＨＪ文庫

HOBBY JAPAN

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孤児院にいた頃に阿九斗に髪飾りをもらったという転校生ケーナ・ドロンズ。阿九斗の記憶にある少女はけーな？　それともケーナ？　積極的に阿九斗に迫るケーナとそれに真面目に対応してしまう阿九斗。その様子を見て愕然とする絢子に不二子やけーな、ころねも加わって騒動を巻き起こす。王道学園コメディの本領が発揮されるシリーズ第6巻。

HOBBY JAPAN

水城正太郎　作品

- せんすいかん　その1
- せんすいかん　その2
- せんすいかん　その3
- せんすいかん　まとめ
- いちばんうしろの大魔王
- いちばんうしろの大魔王ACT2
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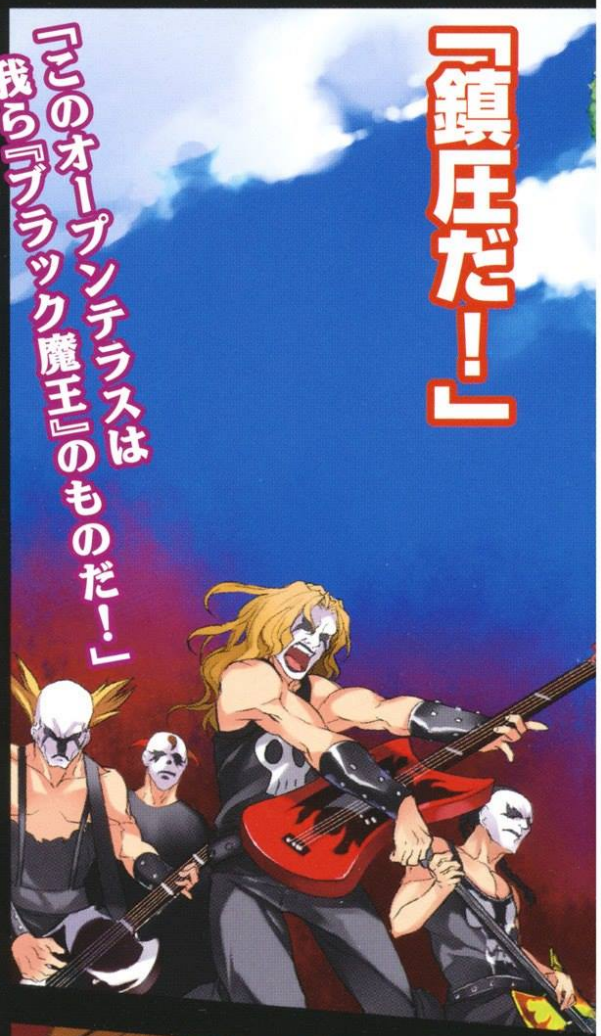
- いちばんうしろの大魔王ACT4
- いちばんうしろの大魔王ACT5
- いちばんうしろの大魔王ACT6

いちばんうしろの
大魔王
ACT6

「……」


「鎮圧だ！」
「このオープンテラスは
我ら『ブラック魔王』のものだ！」

Mayhem（G）

「あれが魔王の実力……」
「アタシのこと、好きになってよ」
「金、金、金！
何かって言えば金だ！」
「払う奴がいるから！」
Buzz（Vo）
Bathory（G）
H.Hammer（Dr）
Venom（B）

絢子

「おおおお、お兄さま…」

セーブ ロード 設定

登場人物紹介

ケーナ・ドロンズ

突然現れたけーなにそっくりな少女。幼い頃、孤児院で阿九斗から髪飾りを受け取ったと主張するが……

ころね

阿九斗の監視と護衛を行なう人造人間。ポシェットから秘密な道具を取り出し使用する。阿九斗をからかうのが大好き。

曽我(そが)けーな

落ちこぼれな天然少女で阿九斗に懐いている。お米が大好き。魔法は苦手だが空を飛ぶことと姿を消すことはできる。

紗伊阿九斗(さいあくと)

将来「魔王」になると（再び？）予言された「善良な」主人公。魔王戦争も一段落したところだが彼の困難は続く。

服部絢子(はっとりじゅんこ)

阿九斗に想いを寄せる一途で純情なクラス委員長。伊賀出身の忍者娘でカエルが苦手。

江藤不二子（えとうふじこ）

阿九斗に忠誠を誓った黒魔術師にして薬物使い。学園のマドンナとして君臨するが実は陰謀が大好き。

リリィ白石（しらいし）

コンスタン魔術学院生徒会長。帽子がトレードマーク。喧嘩っ早く「小さい」と言われると切れてしまう。

三輪寛（みわひろし）

阿九斗の弟分を名乗るトラブルメイカー。阿九斗の発言をいちいち誤解し阿九斗の悪名を高めるのに一役を買っている。

Prologue

It had been a complete coincidence.

No one had been hoping for it.

Whether they were born naturally or artificially created, every living creature was watched by someone. In most cases, they were welcomed. In a few cases, they were detested. Even so, focus was gathered on them at the moment of their birth.

However, that girl was an exception.

"The scans show that she is human, but there are no past data logs of her," explained the L'Isle-Adam secretary.

An office filled an entire floor of a high-rise building. Shiraishi Shouji, a priest of the god Megis, irritatedly tapped his finger against a desk at one end of that office.

He had an oddly sharp look to his eyes that made one think he had reckless younger days. He was the father of Lily Shiraishi, Constant Magic Academy's student council president. As his daughter's personality would suggest, Shouji's mischievous behavior was still going strong even as he passed middle age. The other priests referred to him as a loaded bullet or ammunition dump.

Shouji served Megis who was the god of culture, the arts, and education. The general image people had of the god was a gentle one far removed from Shouji's attitude. The temple was not located in this high-rise building. It was inside a building filled with a cultural atmosphere and surrounded by works of art. Shouji worked behind the scenes, but he had a relatively high position among the priests. He was the official in charge of the education field.

"Why does our sect have to handle this?" asked Shouji.

However, he was well aware of the answer. The secretary gave the exact response he had expected.

"Someone not in the family register is normally treated as an illegal immigrant, but for some reason, that girl has received the baptism of Megis."

"And yet there is no data log of her past."

In that empire, people were baptized by a god as soon as they were born. And that god would then record data on every action they took. If their actions were good, they would be given the blessing of being able to use magic. That was the social service the imperial government provided for its people.

Naturally, the family register was managed differently. Registration of foreigners was managed with a different system from the gods. There were some who refused to be baptized and foreigners would of course not be baptized.

That girl had been found standing alone at the site of the recent demon king war.

According to the knights who had brought her in for protection, she could speak and she knew who she was, but she knew nothing about the land she had been found in.

"However, logs do exist from the moment she appeared standing there," explained the secretary lightly.

"Then are you saying she is an angel that descended from heaven?" asked Shouji jokingly.

However, the secretary nodded.

"Possibly."

"That would be nice. Makes me feel like we've been saved. After all, that would mean they chose our sect."

"Joking aside, you must decide how to deal with this," said the secretary coldly.

"Keh," spat out Shouji. "There's only one way I can deal with this. We have to treat her like a foreigner. You've contacted the Mopha priests, right?"

"We have requested that she be registered as a student from the United States."

Mopha was the god of cultural exchange and negotiations.

"I see. In that case, my daughter can handle the rest."

Shouji adjusted his position in his chair and the chair back shook.

"Your daughter is the academy's student council president, correct?"

Shouji nodded while looking displeased yet grinning.

"Yes. She does nothing but cause trouble, though. I hear she even got into a fight with the cabinet office during that recent skirmish."

"I am glad to hear she is doing well. But will this be okay? It seems the black magicians are targeting this girl. There have been several attempts to access the data on her."

"Rumors sure get out fast. There is a rumor that someone altered the data log, isn't there? Well, they might be targeting this girl, but we can leave the investigation and observation to my daughter."

Shouji opened a mana screen on his desk and displayed an image of the girl's face and her profile.

Her name was Keena Dorons.

"It is not that I do not trust your daughter, but will this be okay? Shouldn't we look after her ourselves?" asked the secretary.

Shouji folded his arms and was unable to keep the irritation off his face.

"We have no clue other than that academy, so we have no other option. But why does she have the memory of being a student at Constant Magic Academy?"

Chapter 1: Chaos Over a Date

"She is a scholarship student from overseas. Please get along well with her."

That troubled comment came from the class's homeroom teacher, Torii Mitsuko. She was tall, had unruly hair, wore glasses, and gave off a sociable impression. Her troubled expression came from the resigned feeling she felt due to Class 1-A's problem student and the strange new student joining it.

The problem student was named Sai Akuto. He was a boy with a mean look in his eyes who sat in a seat at the very back of the classroom. He was perfectly attractive, but he had been born with the look of a clever villain. That look caused plenty of misunderstandings, but that was not the problem. According to a prediction that had never been wrong before, he would become the demon king in the future and he had actually become the demon king once before. Due to various circumstances, he had returned to only being a possible demon king, but those details meant little to his classmates. They saw themselves as sharing a classroom with the one who would destroy the world, so an odd tension was always filling the class.

However, Akuto himself had an introspective and diligent personality. It bothered him terribly that his classmates feared him so much.

—A transfer student? I hope it's someone who won't be too afraid of me…

That was Akuto's earnest thought.

"Okay. Come in, Keena-chan."

On Mitsuko-sensei's instruction, a beautiful girl with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a cheerful, innocent, and cute smile entered the classroom.

Akuto's eyes were glued to her.

But not because of her looks. A hair decoration with a bird design glittered in her hair.

—Th-that's the hair decoration I gave Keena when I left the orphanage.

Akuto stood up without thinking and the girl's gaze stopped on him.

"I-it's you!"

She ran past the lectern and all the way to Akuto's desk in the very back. She then wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Do you remember your promise from the orphanage? My name is Keena! I've wanted to see you for so long!"

The blonde girl going by the name Keena spoke with a foreign accent.

—Eh? There are two Keenas?

Akuto looked over at the red-haired Keena. She was sitting in her seat and was looking up at Akuto and the blonde Keena with a look of surprise.

"Ahh, I will never let you go, my darling!" said the blonde Keena.

It is now necessary to look back into Akuto's memories.

He grew up in an orphanage.

When he left that orphanage, he encountered a girl who he gave a hair decoration that he bought using all of the money he had. And he had promised to meet her again in the future.

The girl with the hair decoration was supposed to be the red-haired Soga Keena. She was his classmate. Those who liked her would describe her as gentle and those who did not would describe her as absentminded. Just looking at her face made one sleepy. She was a strange girl who loved rice and was only skilled at flying and turning invisible.

However, two identical hair decorations were now before Akuto's eyes.

"Wh-why do you have the same hair decoration? And how do you remember what happened in the orphanage?"

Akuto looked back and forth between the two Keenas in confusion. Both of them wore that hair decoration. It had been expensive, but it had definitely been a premade product. For that reason, it was not too surprising for someone to have another one. However…

—Why does she remember the orphanage? Does that mean she's my-…

"Ahh!"

The redheaded Keena suddenly stood up and pointed at the blonde Keena.

Akuto looked nervously over at her.

—Did she just remember something? Did she find something that contradicts what this new girl is saying?

"You have the same name as me!"

The redheaded Keena grinned.

The classmates who knew the circumstances surrounding Akuto and Keena fell from their seats and Akuto mentally held his head in his hands.

—Come to think of it, Keena always said she didn't remember that time in the orphanage no matter how many times I asked.

"Hey, darling. Who is this girl? She is being too familiar," complained the blonde Keena.

"Too familiar? She's your classmate, isn't she? And sorry, but what you are doing could be considered too familiar as well. We only just met," said Akuto.

A sorrowful look appeared on her face.

"Oh! I can't believe it! How sad! How can you say we only just met!? This hair decoration you gave me in the orphanage has been supporting my heart all this time!"

"You mean you were the one crying in the orphanage? I recall that girl having red hair."

"Blonde hair can look red when you are young! Okay, our memories match! You must be my darling!"

The blonde Keena rubbed her face against Akuto's chest.

"S-stop that. Class is about to start."

As Akuto spoke in a troubled voice, another voice spoke up.

"What do you think you are doing in the classroom!? You may be a transfer student, but you are a classmate the instant you enter the classroom. I will make sure you obey our rules!"

The girl who produced that angry shout and stood up was Hattori Junko, the class representative. She had a cool and noble beauty, but the look in her eyes was a bit harsh and her personality was stubborn.

The blonde Keena glanced over at Junko with disagreeableness or even malice in her eyes.

"Darling, is that girl jealous because she is in love with you? Why else would she jeal-at-ous…I mean, yell at us!?"

"I do not want to hear terrible puns from a foreigner! And that is not what I was warning you about! I was saying you have not introduced yourself!"

Junko grew even angrier as she yelled.

"It's definitely jealousy."

The blonde Keena glanced over at Junko and wrapped her arms around Akuto's neck so she could see.

"I-I said that is not it!" denied Junko as she blushed.

Akuto gently removed Keena's arms and spoke decisively.

"That's right. Hattori-san is not jealous."

"Y-yes. B-but…no… You do not have to sound so sure of yourself when you say that…"

Junko grew flustered.

"Come on. Go up front and introduce yourself," urged Akuto.

The blonde Keena nodded, jogged up to the front of the classroom, and energetically raised her hands.

"Hello, everyone from the empire! I am Keena Dorons from the United States! I had heard the empire was a strict hegemony, but it looks like you aren't all bad people. I think I can get along with you just fine!"

The blonde Keena gave a ridiculous greeting.

"So do you know her?" asked Miwa Hiroshi.

He was one of Akuto's few friends. He was a short boy with a mischievous look and he referred to Akuto as "aniki".

"Maybe. To be honest, I don't really know," replied Akuto as they lined up in the dining hall to eat.

"What do you mean you don't really know?"

"Well, even if she is the girl I remember, I only spoke with her that one time. Meeting her again at this age isn't that much different from meeting her for the first time. I'm not sure how much it matters if she really is the girl or not."

"I suppose you're right."

"Yes. And there's something odd about her."

"Something odd?"

"I'm not sure how to say it, but everything about her feels awkward."

As soon as Akuto said that, he heard a voice from one end of the dining hall.

"Oh! So I have to line up here!? Wait, I have to pay? I thought everything in the academy was free!"

It was the blonde Keena's voice.

Akuto could not ignore this, so he stood up. Keena began waving at him when she noticed.

"Darling! Help me! I don't understand the dining hall system!"

"Are you having trouble?"

Akuto walked over to her.

As soon as he did, the dining hall grew noisy. Akuto's face and name were known all across the school. And not in a good way.

The students who had been angry at Keena for cutting in front of them in line frantically split apart to create a path for him.

—Y'know, it bothers me when you're that afraid of me.

He complained in his heart, but Akuto had a bad habit of wanting to look his best when in the public eye. He made sure to speak as politely as possible and waved his hands calmly.

"Excuse me. She is from overseas, so she has yet to learn how things work here. It seems she did not bring any money with her."

The instant he said that, several students pulled money from their wallets and held it out toward Keena.

—Th-that isn't what I meant…

However, Keena cheerfully took one of the bills held out to her.

"Thank you very much! You should have done this in the first place! Oh, I will have Meal A!"

"Ah…"

Akuto tried to stop her, but Keena had already ordered the meal.

—This isn't right.

Akuto began to frown without realizing it. The crowd around him grew tense and no one dared move an inch. Those on the other side of the dining hall had already begun fleeing.

Akuto walked over to the student who had given Keena the money.

The poor student's legs were trembling and his expression had stiffened.

"Y-yes!? What do you need!?"

"I was not asking for money, so I will pay you back. I was planning to give this money to her in the first place, so do not worry about it," explained Akuto as he handed the boy a bill.

The student accepted it with a trembling hand.

"Everyone who tried to give her money is an idiot. The demon king is famous for being a lady killer. They got in the way when he was trying to show off."

"Ahh, ahh. He's glaring at that one guy. I think I know who he's going to kill first."

All of the surrounding students began whispering similar comments.

—That is not what I was trying to do…

As Akuto complained silently, Keena began tugging on his hand. She held the bowl for Meal A in one hand.

"Darling, let's go eat over there! This country's food uses so many different dishes! I couldn't believe it! But the contents are much too poor for a member of high society like me!"

The students began whispering once more as they watched Akuto and Keena walk off together.

"Ugh. Why do all the cute girls give in to him?"

"Well, he's the demon king. He's amazing in a lot of different ways."

"I kind of wish I was like him…"

"But I kind of don't want to be like him…"

With his back turned to that envy, Akuto returned to his seat near Hiroshi. He found the redheaded Keena sitting there as well.

"A-chan, Keena-chan is…no, it's weird calling her that. She's Dorons, so…Doro-chan! Doro-chan is with you?"

The redheaded Keena was quickly eating her meal as she spoke. Her meal was Meal K which had been created especially for her after she continually requested it. It came with white rice, deep-fried rice (rice deep-fried in rice flour), rice salad, a spring roll in rice paper, and rice noodle soup. Basically, it was a special menu made entirely out of white rice. The K of Meal K was said to either stand for Keena or Kome[1]. The other students could order it, but no one else had ever finished that legendary meal.

"She's only with me because she was causing a commotion over there."

"I do not understand this academy's dining hall system! They should explain that kind of thing!" said the blonde Keena as she sat down and began eating her meal.

She had chosen Meal A which was perfectly normal. But after biting into one of fried side dishes and bringing a forkful of white rice to her mouth, she shook her head in disgust.

"Ohh! What is this rice stuff!? How can you eat this!? It is not suitable for a member of high society like me!"

For once, the redheaded Keena actually stood up so quickly her chair clattered.

"That isn't true! Rice is delicious!"

"It is merely your opinion that it is delicious. It is my opinion that it is disgusting. That is all there is to it!" readily denied the blonde Keena, but the redheaded Keena refused to back down.

"Regardless of what you think of the taste, it has plenty of nutrients. Rice is a whole food! You can survive by eating nothing but it!"

—No, you would get beriberi from a vitamin deficiency.

Akuto kept that comment to himself.

But the blonde Keena vigorously shook her head for an unrelated reason.

"Even if it has nutrients, you can't just eat one thing all the time! And you have no right to say anything to me about this! I will eat bread instead!"

The blonde Keena stood up and bought a sandwich with what was left of the money she had been given. She placed it on the table and made a loud announcement.

"Man can live by bread alone!"

—What a terribly unspiritual announcement.

Akuto made another internal comment.

But the redheaded Keena vigorously shook her head for an unrelated reason.

"Rice takes 88 steps to prepare!"

The two continued to argue after that while also eating the Meal K and the sandwich.

"By the way, aniki, most of that Meal A is left."

Hiroshi pointed at the bowl the blonde Keena had left. It had been abandoned with only one bite taken out of it.

"We can split it between ourselves."

As the two Keenas argued, the boys ate both their own meals and the Meal A. By the time they put down their chopsticks, Akuto was dragged into the argument.

"I really, super, special, perfectly haven't liked you from the moment I laid eyes on you! You are jealous of me and darling, aren't you!?"

The blonde Keena grabbed onto Akuto's arm.

"I'm not jealous! A-chan and I are sworn friends!"

The redheaded Keena slammed a hand down on the table.

The blonde Keena looked down at the redheaded Keena with a cynical look in her eyes.

"Heh heh. Friends, you say? Then you will sit idly by and watch us go on a date, right!?"

"A date?"

The redheaded Keena was shocked. The blonde Keena leaned up against Akuto as she glanced over at the other Keena.

"You don't know what a date is? When a guy and a girl want to test if they will make a good boyfriend and girlfriend, they go to a high society, LOHAS, lovely, and refreshing café where you can eat sweets! They drink tea together there and become boyfriend and girlfriend if they like each other!"

—Is that really what a date is? Or is that how it works in the United States?

Akuto was skeptical.

"They become boyfriend and girlfriend if they like each other?"

"That's right. How to make your intentions clear is up to the individual, but after the tea, the guy will make his advances on the girl. What happens after that decides it. It is the fork in the road of fate," declared Keena confidently. "Let's go on a date after class the day after tomorrow! I want to go to a high society, LOHAS, lovely, and refreshing café where you can eat sweets, that is perfect for a date, and will accelerate romance!"

"Anyway, it seems I've gotten this forced onto me."

After returning to his dorm room after the day's classes, Akuto sought advice from the beautiful girl lying in his bed.

She had soft green hair, her facial features had the perfect beauty of a doll, and she had the beautiful figure of a statue a sculptor made of the ideal girl. However, she was untidily lying on the bed, reading a magazine, and munching on ningyou-yaki from a bag next to her. She was acting more like a middle-aged housewife or an unemployed youth than a beautiful girl.

"Is that so?" said Korone.

She was an artificial human known as a L'Isle-Adam and she had been sent by the government to act as Akuto's observer because he was predicted to become the demon king.

"Is that all you're going to say?" asked Akuto.

"It is a personal issue, so it does not require my interference. Also, you never told me what you want advice on."

"Oh, you're right. Let's see… It seems whether we become boyfriend and girlfriend is decided afterwards, so I think I will decisively turn her down," declared Akuto.

"That seems too decisive," commented Korone as she looked up from her magazine.

"I don't know her very well. This is something we should talk about after we have known each other as friends for a certain period of time. We mustn't rush it."

Akuto's reasoning was much too serious. This aspect of his personality was one of his virtues and one of his faults.

"Then why not go ahead and tell her so?"

"Dorons-san insisted that she would not hear my answer until after the date."

"That is odd compared to normal human behavior. It is as if she wants to go through a series of steps," analyzed Korone.

"That's why it looks like I have to go through those steps with her. Anyway, I want you to tell me where I can find a high society, LOHAS, lovely, and refreshing café where you can eat sweets, that is perfect for a date, and will accelerate romance."

Akuto had an excellent memory.

Korone sat up in the bed and faced Akuto.

"Can't you search the internet yourself?"

"I already tried, but I can't seem to get a feel for it."

Akuto pulled out his student handbook and displayed the cafés he had chosen on its mana screen. They were all refined places marketed towards adults. There was one that became a bar at night, one that insisted on cold-brew coffee, one that served matcha in a tatami mat room and required a membership, and one that used only ornaments from the countries of foreign minorities.

"These are not places to go on a high school date. How did a search leave you with these?"

"I was asked to find a high society, LOHAS, lovely, and refreshing café where you can eat sweets, that is perfect for a date, and will accelerate romance. This is what happens when I tried to meet all of those requirements. No, I actually wasn't able to fit in 'will accelerate romance' because it's too abstract."

Akuto's expression was perfectly serious.

Korone stared back at him.

"This is not the first time I have seriously wondered if you are a complete idiot," she said.

"I know. I have no knowledge or experience in this kind of thing."

Akuto's expression grew even more serious.

Korone stared back at him even more.

"I will give you some advice. The standard place for a date is a companion café."

"A companion café?"

Akuto did not seem to understand, so Korone gave a thorough explanation.

"A companion café is a café in which only male and female couples may enter. The seats are divided into small booths where the couple must sit next to each other. They usually have a free self-service drink bar, so they have no waiters. The lights inside are dimmed to the limit so the others in the café cannot see what you are doing."

"Why would-…?"

"It is none of the café's concern if you choose to engage in sexual intercourse there. For those who prefer exhibitionism, there are some cafés that keep the lights fully on and keep the drink bar and playroom separate. Those cafés are often used by married couples who enjoy swapping partners with other couples and showing off their sexual relations to each other. The cafés that allow single men inside are known as happening bars. In some of them, naked women will suddenly appear and ask to have sex. Whether you accept or not is entirely up to you."

With that last comment, Korone pointed at Akuto.

Akuto sighed.

"I see. So you don't want to give a serious answer."

"Of course not. Who would help someone else down the path of love? Especially when it is the boy you love and another woman," said Korone.

"Eh?"

Akuto looked back at her in surprise.

Korone's closed lips formed a flat line. She slowly stuck her tongue out between them like a fax machine. She ended up with her tongue sticking out on an otherwise expressionless face.

"Just kidding."

"I should be used to this after you keep teasing me, but those expressionless jokes are always a shock."

Akuto hung his head down.

Korone raised her arms up high and placed her index fingers on the top of her head to perform the finishing blow. And she remained completely expressionless all the while.

"Just kidding."

The following morning, Keena Dorons continued to follow Akuto around and he continued to rack his brain for a café to choose.

"Have you found a high society, LOHAS, lovely, and refreshing café where you can eat sweets, that is perfect for a date, and will accelerate romance yet?"

"Oh, well, no, not yet. But I'll find something."

"I can't have you being good-for-nothing, darling. But I am sure you will find something! No, if you can't find anything, then just order one the commoners around you to do it!"

Keena pointed at their classmates.

Naturally, the students did not look pleased. However, none of them expressed any direct complaints or anger while Akuto was present.

"You shouldn't say things like that," chided Akuto, but Keena did not take him seriously.

"Oh, you are so kind to the commoners, darling."

"That isn't what I meant."

—Is she selfish or just childish?

As he thought on that, he heard another voice.

"Today's lesson is hands on."

It was Junko.

"Oh, Hattori-san. I see. So it's hands on. Dorons-san, what will you do?"

Junko pouted her lips when Akuto said that.

"Is this any time to be worrying about the new student? I am the only one who can handle being your partner, so I need you to focus on doing this well."

This was an academy for learning magic, so the main part of the classes was the hands on lessons. Some of them were dangerous such as lessons in controlling destructive magic. Akuto always seemed to cause some sort of chaos during these lessons because he simply had too much magic power.

"Understood. I will do my best to make sure you are not harmed."

Akuto's comment could have sounded conceited to some, but it was nothing more than Akuto's bad habit. Nevertheless, Junko blushed.

"Y-you idiot. Do not say it like that."

The blonde Keena had been listening and now she spoke up.

"Hah! Don't make me laugh! There is no way you are fit to be my darling's partner!"

"Why do you keep calling him your darling? I have been lenient with you because you are a foreigner, but I cannot allow that during a hands on magic lesson. Magic is the empire's technology. If you underestimate it, you really will get hurt."

Junko and Keena glared at each other.

"I am not underestimating magic. If my darling and I are together, everything will be fine!"

"That is what I mean by underestimating it. The empire's technology is-…"

"I had heard this place was nationalistic and xenophobic and it looks like that was spot on!"

"What? Fine then. Just try being his partner and get blown away! You can regret your own foolishness afterwards."

Junko angrily stalked off.

—What am I supposed to do?

Akuto was troubled, but the lesson began regardless.

The lesson involved performing precise work with telekinesis. They learned how to use magic to control small objects and move them on a millimeter scale.

"We only have so many micrometers and sets of objects, so form groups of two. Once you can do it on your own, try to do it while working together," said Mitsuko-sensei. She then added, "Sai-kun, you work far away from everyone else. You don't have to work with a partner either."

The other students stood in front of some blocks of various sizes placed on the classroom's desks, but Mitsuko-sensei pointed toward a single desk in the middle of the schoolyard.

"Well, I knew this was going to happen."

Akuto obediently made his way out into the schoolyard, but the blonde Keena followed him.

"Darling, let's do our best!"

"Eh? But the teacher told me to do it on my own. You don't have to force yourself to work with me. You don't have to worry about what the class rep said either."

"Don't worry. We can do it if we work together!"

Keena ran ahead and dragged Akuto to the center of the schoolyard.

"You shouldn't take this so lightly. I'm especially bad at this kind of detailed work. I feel like an idiot saying it like this, but it's like using a missile to open a can. C'mon, go back with everyone else."

He looked back toward the classroom window. Unsurprisingly, Mitsuko-sensei and their classmates were telling Keena to come back.

But Keena laughed it off.

"Ah ha ha. It won't be a problem. We just have to show them the strength of our bonds!"

Keena took Akuto's hand and guided it toward the blocks sitting on the desk.

"Again: you can't do-…"

Akuto trailed off and fell silent when he felt warmth fill the arm Keena was holding.

—What? My power is…

"See, it's completely fine!"

Keena smiled at Akuto.

Akuto had of course not intended to use any power. However, a narrow stream of mana appeared at the end of the hand Keena was holding.

Mana was scattered throughout the atmosphere. When it responded to the mana inside one's body, it could act on objects. That was why mana was harder to control the greater the amount of mana in one's body.

Also, it was exceedingly difficult to interfere with the mana in someone else's body. One's internal mana had inherent mana waves that only resonated with the brainwaves of that person.

—She's resonating with my mana waves?

He could think of no other possibility. Keena was manipulating the mana within his body and controlling it perfectly.

Akuto's surprise reached his classmates back in the classroom.

Mitsuko-sensei had displayed footage of them on a mana screen in the classroom. That footage showed the small blocks on the desk being controlled perfectly. The smallest blocks were inside a clear plastic box and were cubes almost as small as the particles making up a powder, but they systematically stacked them up to form a wall.

"What!? Impossible!" cried Junko.

"The new student from overseas?" asked Etou Fujiko.

On the surface, she was the academy's greatest beauty, had grades at the top of the academy, worked as the girls' dormitory leader, and was admired by both boys and girls alike. In secret, she was a black magic adherent who adored Akuto.

Sitting before her was Lily Shiraishi, the student council president and one of the few people who knew her true identity. Lily had called Fujiko to the student council room.

"Yes. That is what she is officially being called, but her true identity is not actually known," explained Lily as she toyed with the brim of her stylish hat.

"Her identity is not known? That sounds dangerous. For one thing, how can one's identity not be known in this empire? If you wish to discuss paranormal phenomena, can it wait until some other time?" replied Fujiko disinterestedly.

Noticing her disinterest, Lily called up a mana screen on her desk that showed the previous lesson.

"As you can see from this, she seems to have some connection to Sai Akuto."

The screen showed the blonde Keena helping Akuto perform detailed mana operations.

"Wh-what!?"

Fujiko gulped.

"That's right. I do not know how, but she is successfully controlling Sai Akuto's mana. This means…"

Before Lily could continue her explanation, Fujiko cut her off.

"She is touching my Akuto-sama's hand so familiarly!"

Fujiko grew enraged, her hair bristled, and she banged on Lily's desk.

Lily was of course taken aback.

"…Um, that isn't the important part."

"Ah! Ho ho… Oh ho ho ho! I was joking, of course! Yes, this is most interesting!"

Fujiko tried to laugh it off, but after a bit, she seemed to realize the importance of what she was seeing. She turned a serious look in Lily's direction.

"You said her identity is unknown?"

"Yes. It seems she just suddenly appeared. And she was found at the site of that battle."

"That battle" referred to the war in which Akuto became the demon king and slew the god Suhara. However, Akuto's presence had been eliminated from most people's memories and they now thought the "previous" demon king had killed Suhara.

"In that case, she might be related to the existence that erased that from everyone's memories," said Fujiko as she folded her arms.

"Exactly. She might be related to the existence known as the Law of Identity. That mysterious will that most likely appears through Soga Keena's body."

"Did you call me here to determine who this new student is?" asked Fujiko.

Lily shook her head.

"No. There are some things we cannot know even if we investigate. We have no clues whatsoever. I just wanted to make sure you were not behind this."

Lily looked at Fujiko with defiant eyes.

Fujiko frowned in displeasure, but she understood what Lily truly meant.

"You may doubt me, but this has nothing at all to do with Akuto-sama's cells I cultivated or with my mana wave research using them. I am embarrassed to admit it, but that the jar was stolen from me just before that battle came to an end."

"By that rubber man?"

Lily looked surprised.

Fujiko nodded.

Lily clicked her tongue.

"Then did they use that to…? No, the timing doesn't fit," muttered Lily before waving a hand. "Understood. Thanks. Sorry about calling you here."

"Think nothing of it. I received valuable information about this new student."

"Are you going to investigate her? Well, try to keep things from getting out of hand."

"No, it has merely given me the desire to fight."

Fujiko laughed with a cruel look on her face.

Junko was suddenly called out to after school.

"Hattori-san, there is something I want to ask you."

"Something you want to ask me?" she repeated before realizing who had spoken to her.

It was Akuto.

Keena Dorons had been constantly following him around since the day before, but she was gone. She must have returned to the dorm after school.

"It is not often you wish to consult with me," said Junko before clearing her throat.

She had grown tense once she realized what the situation was.

The two of them were alone in the evening hallway.

She recalled that she had announced she would stay with Akuto even if it meant disobeying her family during that war and she had told Akuto as such.

"S-so what is it?" asked Junko while facing the setting sun to hide her blushing face.

"I was wondering if you knew a good café for a date," said Akuto casually.

"A-a date?"

Junko turned around in surprise.

"Yes. I don't know what kind of café to choose. I asked Korone, but she only gave me strange answers."

"I-I-I-I see."

Junko was horribly flustered.

"Are you okay?"

"Y-yes, I am fine. N-now, then… There is place near the station that is… No, that is not a good place for a date. Leave the station, turn right, and continue for a while. Continue out of the shopping district and into the residential district and there is an open terrace café. It is owned by a pastry chef, so you can buy cakes at the neighboring store."

As Junko explained, Akuto nodded in satisfaction.

"That sounds good."

"It would be best to reserve a table the day before. B-by the way, when were you planning to have this date?"

"Tomorrow."

"T-tomorrow. I see."

—That is very sudden. What do I do? Should I buy some new clothes? No, it would seem odd if I went that far. I need to keep this casual. But he is the one inviting me on the date, so this has an almost 100% chance of being fine. I do not need to worry too much and there will be no problems. But he might think I would go on a date with just anyone if I accept too readily. I can't let him remain completely in control. I know. I can pretend I have plans and act a bit reluctant. It wouldn't be bad to look a bit troubled.

As Junko made up her jumbled mind, she turned away and spoke.

"I have some plans tomorrow…but I suppose it isn't anything too important. I told my little sister I would go see her concert. But if you insist…I can give you priority. After all, my sister is doing things like that all the time. Ha ha… Ha ha…"

But she had spoken so quietly that Akuto had not heard her.

"Thanks so much. Dorons-san said she wanted to go to a high society, LOHAS, lovely, and refreshing café where you can eat sweets, that is perfect for a date, and will accelerate romance," he said with an innocent smile.

Junko instantly froze as if she had been thrown into a world of eternal winter.

"W-wait a second. This date is with that new student?"

Akuto nodded innocently and said, "Yes. She asked, so I figured I could go drink some tea with her."

"W-wait… Wait just a second… Are you telling me you are going on a date with that new student…and just because she asked?"

"Well, yes. It would be odd to refuse her, don't you think? And it seems dates are treated a lot less seriously in the United States."

"I-I see… So that's it. Ha. Ha ha. Ha ha ha."

"A-are you okay? You don't look very good."

Akuto was worried, but Junko was too busy staggering and going pale from shock.

—I-I see… Why did I never think of that? I just had to ask and he would have gone on a date… That's right. He is that kind of guy, isn't he?

"An observation target made a reservation at a café? What is the café's name? Café Bakhtin? When is the reservation?"

A local knight leader carried out telepathic communications with a tense look. He immediately entered the information into a handbook.

A tense atmosphere quickly filled the knight station. Twenty skilled knights were on duty, but they all stood up and watched their leader's expression.

"Understood. We will do our best to police the area."

After ending the telepathic connection, the knight leader glanced across his men's faces. Those faces held a mixture of expectation and fear. He spoke to them resolutely.

"We have word from the cabinet office. The boy who is a possible demon king will use Café Bakhtin in District 2 tomorrow at 3 PM. We must do our best to keep the people safe!"

"Ohhhh!" cheered his men.

Korone was not slacking on her duties as observer. She was providing detailed reports to the government on Akuto's actions. And when he made any kind of major action, the report would immediately be sent to this knight station in the same city as Constant Magic Academy.

But as an orphan with no home to return to, Akuto rarely entered that city. For that reason, this was their first large scale operation.

"Contact Café Bakhtin! Have our female members slip in as waitresses! Ask to have them trained in waiting tables by noon tomorrow! We will go with defense plan 1B! Keep your armor at a level low enough to not concern the people! Don't forget to request cooperation from the neighboring knight stations! And most importantly, do not allow the people to be hurt!" roared the knight leader.

The knights called up maps onto the mana screens in the station and began to add red pointers on them.

He did not know it yet, but the following day would contain the longest afternoon that knight leader had ever experienced.

"Um, senpai, you don't have to go this far."

Akuto felt bad for everything Fujiko was doing for him.

The mirror in front of him showed him in a casual outfit. Unlike when he chose clothes for himself, they were coordinated and he was even wearing accessories. The outfit had been selected by Fujiko. He did not own very many clothes, but Fujiko had changed his appearance quite a bit with the combination she had selected.

"No, the demon king I adore must always look magnificent. Ho ho ho."

Fujiko laughed and fixed Akuto's collar. She then styled his hair with wax.

Fujiko had borrowed the home economics room to help Akuto change into his casual outfit. The two of them were quite tall, so they looked like models. A large number of female students and a few male students had gathered outside the window to watch them.

"Ahh, Fujiko-sama is so beautiful…"

"But why is she so attached to the demon king?"

"I hate to admit it, but he is good looking. If only he wasn't the demon king."

"No, this would be unforgivable even if he wasn't the demon king!"

"That's right! He's stolen our Fujiko-sama!"

"But there's no way we can beat him in a fight."

The students continued to give similar comments.

While watching those students out of the corner of her eye, Fujiko saw Akuto off in his new perfect outfit.

"Finished. Have a good time."

Fujiko smiled kindly and Akuto bowed to her and left the home economics room. He was secretly suspicious of her out-of-the-ordinary attitude. He could not imagine she would let him get even remotely close to another girl.

Akuto's fears were of course warranted. After watching him turn the corner of the hallway, Fujiko quickly cleaned up the home economics room and began pursuing Akuto.

"Yes. I am not about to just let you go on your date. If the girl was not that new student with such a strange mystery surrounding her, I would have immediately sent her to hell."

An evil grin appeared on Fujiko's lips as soon as she was out of view of the surrounding students.

"Yes, I want to confirm some things about this mysterious new student as well," said a sudden voice.

Korone had appeared behind Fujiko at some point.

"Wh-when did you get behind me?"

"Is your back that valuable? And it is completely normal for an observer to follow her observation target."

Korone seemed intent to enter the city. She was wearing casual clothes for once.

"It is a bother, but I suppose I have no choice," complained Fujiko.

She began tailing Akuto along with Korone.

And as Akuto left through the school's main gate, Fujiko chanced upon another pursuer.

"S-senpai! Why are you here?" asked a flustered Junko when she saw Fujiko.

"That is what I would like to ask you. However, I get the feeling our reasons are the same."

Junko was of course in casual clothes as well.

This made three pursuers.

Akuto met Keena Dorons in front of the school's main gate. Keena was wearing a lively outfit in the style of the United States.

"I see. If she is that sporty, maybe I should have held back on the luxurious side of things."

Fujiko regretted her own coordination. Seeing that, Junko grew suspicious.

"Senpai, why are you so calm? This is not how you would normally react."

"Ho ho ho. I would never freely let Akuto-sama have a date. The necklace I lent him has magic built in. When those around it consume caffeine, they lose all self-restraint as if they have been drinking alcohol. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say it has the same effects as a truth serum.

This will allow us to know who this new student really is! Heh heh heh," laughed Fujiko.

Junko could not help but take a step back from Fujiko.

"Y-you scare me… So at the worst, she will act like a drunk and make Akuto hate her. And if it works, we will know her identity."

"Exactly. Also, Akuto-sama's bracelet has magic built in that defends against those effects. He will not be affected by the necklace at all!" announced Fujiko in satisfaction.

"This is obviously the pattern where your scheme fails and causes great confusion," muttered Korone. "That always happens when one relies on secret tools. Isn't that common knowledge?"

"That is not common knowledge at all!" shouted Fujiko angrily.

Junko held her head in her hands.

"Ahh, why did I come here? If I had known this would happen, I would have gone to Yuuko's concert."

Junko's younger sister Yuuko was announcing a new song at a department store as the idol Hoshino Yuri, but that had no bearing on what would soon occur.

<The target has passed by the station.>

A man in a suit with an expectant look saw Akuto and Keena Dorons pass the station. He was a knight in disguise, so he immediately contacted the other knights.

Other knights dressed as a housewife, a delivery boy, and someone walking their dog also informed the others where Akuto was.

However, the knights were not the only ones on edge.

"I-is that-…?"

"He's that rumored academy student…"

The people of the city knew what Akuto looked like thanks to the other students at Constant Magic Academy. The knights had not warned of

Akuto's arrival, so in the eyes of the townspeople, the demon king had suddenly appeared.

Shutters began to close over shops and mothers tugged their children's hands as they ran away. Only the disguised knights were left on the streets.

<Not good. The people know more about the demon king than we thought!>

<Is that why!? We just received advance notice of a crime! Demon king worshipers are entering the city to come into contact with the target!>

<Can we hold them back?>

<We are cordoning off the area! But these worshipers are normal people! We need some countermeasure in case they break through!>

The knights' communications line was very noisy.

Akuto had of course noticed something was odd.

—Oh, no. Does everyone in the city know me, too? I need to avoid coming here much.

The closing shutters hurt Akuto.

"Why are the shops closing? There was so much I wanted you to buy me!" complained Keena.

"Well, they have their reasons. But I don't have very much money, so I couldn't buy you anything expensive even if the shops were open."

"There's a bank over there! Banks have money, right?"

"They do, but not for me."

Akuto shrugged.

"C'mon, you can just go get a little!"

<The target is plotting to rob a bank!>

<Send knights to the bank immediately!>

<Hurry! If the target enters the bank, you have permission to use your weapons!>

"You shouldn't make it sound like I would rob a bank. You need to have more class."

Akuto shook his head.

"Then how do you get money?" asked Keena in confusion.

—It's like she has no knowledge about the world at all.

Akuto was surprised. He decided to give her a thorough explanation.

"Normally, you work. If you are not going to work, you need some capital to begin with. Then you can buy and trade stocks. In other words, you obtain the right to manage a company. If you manage it well and it grows, you can sell the company. That's more or less it."

"Oh! I don't really get it! It sounds hard!"

Keena held her head in her hands.

"It is, but I want to participate in society to the point that I can tell companies what to do."

<He might have already bought some stocks! Get the fund people to help us! Have them search their customers for the demon king!>

<That girl with the demon king is from the United States! Check for a line to foreign money laundering!>

While spreading unexpected confusion behind them, Akuto and Keena arrived at Café Bakhtin.

"Welcome," said the café owner with a bow.

The owner was real, but all of the waitresses and customers behind him were disguised knights.

"Oh, good. This place is still open."

Akuto saw Keena to her seat and glanced around the café. An odd tension hung over it.

—I get the feeling we're being monitored.

Akuto silently swore to remain on his best behavior.

Meanwhile, the three pursuing Akuto hid on the road opposite the café.

They sipped at drink cans while watching Akuto and Keena.

"We really are pathetic to be spying on someone else's date."

"We are only stopping for a drink. But keep watching. This will eventually transform into a disastrous scene. Heh heh heh."

Junko and Fujiko were whispering to each other.

While the two of them were enveloped by a grim atmosphere, Korone looked carefree.

"Oh, things appear to be going well."

Despite being expressionless, Korone's voice held an odd sense of excitement. She ate ningyou-yaki from a bag she had brought with her. She was in full spectator mode.

"You certainly sound carefree. Do you enjoy spying on people's dates that much?" complained Fujiko.

"A bit," said Korone with a nod.

Korone had said things were going well and the two of them did indeed look like a nice couple.

Akuto had sworn not to cause any trouble and he was showing almost oddly perfect consideration for both Keena and those around them.

As an orphan, Akuto had worked to earn the money needed to transfer to the academy, so he was well-versed in the ways of the world. They made their orders while Akuto steered the conversation such that Keena would not do anything too odd due to her lack of knowledge. He had worked in restaurants before, so he understood exactly what items would be a bother to quickly make. He made sure to avoid such things when making his order. He of course made sure Keena did not realize he had changed her initial ridiculous order.

Akuto could be this considerate if he put his mind to it. The reason he did not normally do so was his complete obliviousness to how girls' hearts worked. And his ability to act this way when needed caused misunderstandings when he did not. His attitude was currently causing Keena to grow a bit flushed.

He selected sweets to perfectly match the current mood and selected a black tea based on the description of which one would match the flavor. He handled the menus and plates carefully and was polite to the waitress. As was the custom in the empire, he smiled and spoke of educational matters after ordering. It would have been hard to find someone who would not misunderstand his intentions.

"H-he has never treated me th-that kindly!"

Fujiko bit her handkerchief.

"N-no, senpai! If you make a misunderstanding here, it is all over! This is just how he is! I have made the same mistake countless times!"

Junko was oddly used to being deceived.

"At any rate, this should get interesting once the coffee arrives. Heh heh heh heh heh."

A laugh escaped Korone's expressionless mouth.

A waitress who was feigning calm but was clearly nervous carried the black tea and cakes to them on a tray.

<The target is behaving well. Are you sure he is not using the café normally?>

The female knight playing the role of a waitress secretly sent a telepathic communication. However, the knight leader immediately denied the possibility.

<Do not let your guard down. The historical demon kings always behaved gentlemanly. This does not mean he does not have a hidden scheme.>

"And here is your small blueberry pie."

The waitress placed the cakes and tea in front of Akuto and Keena.

"I would expect nothing less of you, darling. You found a high society, luxurious, economical café that is perfect for me and you chose the perfect sweets to match!"

Keena was in an excellent mood.

"Yes, but I didn't actually choose the café."

"Don't worry! It doesn't change the fact that you are the best, darling!"

Keena's mood improved further as she took a bite of the cake.

"This uses excellent wheat!"

"I'm glad. I can't comment on the wheat, but it does taste good."

Akuto nodded and took a sip of the tea.

His necklace and bracelet gave off a dull light.

Keena then brought her own teacup to her mouth.

"Here it comes!"

"This is it!"

"She drank it."

Fujiko, Junko, and Korone all spoke at once.

If the magic took effect, Keena would be in a state similar to having taken a truth serum. And the three of them saw that exact change come over her.

"Hey, darling. There is something I didn't tell you."

Keena placed her cup down and spoke in a gloomy tone that was the exact opposite of her previous cheerful one.

She cast her eyes down and placed her hands on her lap. Akuto did not know what to make of her unusual behavior.

"Wh-what is it?"

"The truth is…I have no memories."

Akuto was confused by the sudden confession.

"Eh?"

"I don't know when I was born or how I got here."

Keena covered her face and started to cry.

"Wait a second. What are you saying?"

"I'm sorry about crying all of a sudden. But it's true. It has to be true…and it makes me so sad…"

"When you say you have no memories, do you mean you have amnesia?" asked Akuto.

Keena shook her head.

"No, not that. I think I was suddenly born. I can tell."

"Eh? Then your memories of me in the orphanage…"

Keena violently shook her head.

"No! That's real. That's a real memory! But that's all I have. I have no other memories!"

Even someone as dense as Akuto suspected this was related to his magic power or to the existence known as the Law of Identity.

But what mattered more was that a girl was crying in front of him.

"I was so worried before I met you. I knew nothing about this world and I was wandering alone… People from the government took me in and I finally made it to you."

Keena continued her tear-filled confession.

Her words rang heavily and directly in Akuto's heart.

He was an orphan, so he felt he understood the sadness of not knowing your own past.

"It's okay. Even if you know nothing but me, I will teach you all sorts of things from now on," said Akuto.

"I-is she the type that starts crying when she drinks? And didn't the atmosphere there grow a bit odd?"

Junko panicked.

"Ahh! Akuto-sama is being so kind to her! I am the only one he is allowed to be kind to!"

Fujiko ripped her handkerchief apart.

"More importantly, I think Keena Dorons just casually made an important statement about her identity," said Korone, but the other two were not listening.

"Akuto, do you love me?"

Keena raised her head and looked at Akuto with teary eyes.

"Eh?"

Akuto froze in place.

He knew he had to take this question seriously.

From Keena's past actions, he could tell she was like a pure child.

"I think you feel this way about me because I am the only person in your memories."

"That is not what I want to hear! Give me a proper answer!"

Keena began crying again.

At the same time, the mana surrounding Akuto stirred.

Akuto's hand moved against his wishes.

—Eh?

Akuto was shocked. He had not tried to, but his hand slowly moved forward.

—My hand is moving on its own?

Akuto's hand gently placed itself on top of Keena's head. She looked up in surprise.

—So is Dorons-san not controlling it?

Akuto was surprised by Keena's surprise, but his hand was clearly moving in a convenient manner for Keena. His hand moved down and brushed her cheek to wipe away her tears.

In that instant, they looked like lovers who had promised their futures to each other.

"Th-this is going too far! I-I-I will cut him down! I will kill him and then myself!"

In her confusion, Junko tried to draw the short sword she had hidden on her.

Korone tilted her head and stopped Junko with the toy reacher she had pulled out from somewhere.

"An odd mana flow is coming from Keena Dorons… Those two are not listening at all."

Fujiko was bristling with her face transformed into something like a hannya mask.

"Kiiiii! This is not going as planned! But just in case, I added a device to the necklace that alters its output! If I max its output, Dorons will be completely drunk! She will make a complete fool of herself! And she will truly shame herself if she wets herself! Heh heh heh… Hah hah hah hah!"

"I have no idea what is even happening anymore," said Korone calmly, but she made no attempt to stop Fujiko.

"Take this!" said Fujiko as she maximized the volume on the control device she had pulled out.

The effects immediately showed themselves.

<Something is happening with the target. The girl is crying! Is she being threatened by the demon king?>

<No. From what I heard of the conversation, it might be a simple dispute.>

As the knights discussed the situation, the ones located in the café suddenly began to act oddly.

<I'm sorry… We may be in the middle of a mission, but I'm not feeling very good.>

<No, wait. Neither am I. Is this some kind of magic?>

The knights playing customers all complained of feeling unwell. They all began carelessly leaning back in their seats as if they could not withstand it anymore. Some even lay down on their table.

Over the long time the ones playing customers had been there, they had drunk a few cups of coffee each. The effects of Fujiko's magic hit them hard.

"I'm sorry… There's something I have to tell you." One of the knights began speaking out loud rather than over the telepathic communications. "I've been sleeping with your wife!"

It was a shocking confession and he had shouted it loud enough to be heard all across the café.

This was of course due to the magic in Akuto's necklace.

The knight being spoken to was completely drunk, but his mouth still fell open at that tremendous shock. Nevertheless, when he actually spoke, it was something unrelated and equally as shocking.

"I've been embezzling equipment costs from our knight station for five years! I've taken a total of 10 million! And I've used it to buy gifts for Takayanagi, the receptionist!"

"Now you've done it," said Korone oddly calmly.

"N-not good! The device should not have had this much output…. They must have consumed a lot of caffeine."

Fujiko frantically fiddled with her device to lower the output.

However…

The knob broke off.

"Ah."

"And there is the expected turn of events. All is right with the world," said Korone as if she were not involved.

Fujiko stared blankly forward with the broken device in hand.

"Senpai, we can only see what happens now. If this reveals corruption within the knights, it is not all bad."

Junko seemed to have come to a realization because she began speaking positively.

"Th-that is right. At any rate, Dorons has almost passed out."

Fujiko accepted the situation as if to abandon all responsibility.

"And in exchange, you have invited in chaos."

An expressionless laugh escaped the corner of Korone's mouth.

The open terrace café was fallen into chaos.

"You son of a bitch! She's my wife!"

"So!? You have no room to talk with how useless you are! Katsuko-san was crying!"

"Don't you dare talk about my family problems! I'll blow you away! Special Knight Attack – Volcano Eruption!"

"Shut up! You'll be the one crying when I'm done with you! Sword Tornado!"

One end of the terrace was blown away. The two knights' magic had collided.

The knight leader naturally gave frantic orders as he listened in via telepathic communication.

<Calm down! You are on duty! Forget everything anyone says until this mission is over!>

"Are you saying we should overlook embezzlement!?"

One knight was red in the face and unable to hold back his sense of justice. He approached the knight who had confessed to the embezzlement.

"It's that greedy woman's fault! Money, money, money! It's always about money with her!"

"That's because someone's willing to pay!"

The two knights drew the electromagnetic swords they used in cities and clashed. The tables around them were blown away in every direction.

"Wah!"

Akuto placed his body over Keena to protect her.

A chair struck his back, but that was no problem for him.

—But…

Akuto could not decide how to resolve the situation. He was willing to bet this was being caused by something Fujiko had set up, but he could not put together a countermeasure without knowing the details.

—I could run…but then the knights would chase after me.

That meant he could not move from where he was.

He glanced around. The drunk knights were violently fighting each other, so the other knights would surely arrive soon.

But they did not.

—Why aren't they trying to stop this?

<They got through a gap! A group of demon king worshipers breached the cordon!>

<You fools! How did that happen!?>

<We were negligent in our duties after the confessions of embezzlement and other dangerous things!>

The knight leader held his head in his hands as he received more and more reports from the scene.

<Adultery is nothing! I know about the knight leader's illegitimate child!>

<The cover up of one of the captain's crimes is pretty amazing, too!>

The revelations continued to come from Café Bakhtin. As long as one followed the rules of one's religion, one's magic power would not be reduced. And to protect people's human rights, it was forbidden to view another's life log without proof of a crime. Even so, the knight leader hung his head down in shock at all the crimes and near-crimes being committed. Even one of his secrets had been exposed.

<I-I only told you about my child because I thought I could trust you… No, that doesn't matter! Hurry up and capture the demon king worshipers!>

<B-but…>

<What is it?>

<The people of the city have noticed the commotion and have gathered in protest around Café Bakhtin!>

<Stop them! Keep them at a distance!> cried the knight leader.

Akuto felt like he was looking into hell itself.

Keena was crying like a child in his arms.

Nearby, the drunks were confessing the secrets of the knights while taking part in a large brawl using magic.

Beyond them, the owner of Café Bakhtin was half in a frenzy trying to stop the destruction of his café.

The knights who were not drunk were running by outside the café. Townspeople with anger in their eyes were marching toward them.

—I only came here to go on a date…

A strange noise and a cloud of dust were approaching from beyond the group of townspeople.

—What is with this atmosphere? The war from the other day was more comfortable than this.

Akuto complained in his heart.

"Wh-what is this odd noise?"

Junko looked left and right.

She could not see far. The three girls were already within the crowd of townspeople. The people had gathered in anger over the knights' revealed scandals and their current violence. Naturally, a lot of the people were simply onlookers, but they still created a great pressure around the café.

Some strange noise was coming from behind the crowd. It was a bizarre noise that was not quite intense music and not quite a complete din.

"My analysis of the waveform says it is coming from musical instruments."

Korone held a hand to her ear and analyzed the sound.

"Why would onlookers be carrying instruments with them?"

Junko looked over in surprise.

At the same time, the sound suddenly grew louder.

With a roar that hurt her ears, the line of townspeople split in two. The people held their ears and tried to run away from the noise.

"Wh-what is that?"

Junko's mouth fell open.

Some men in bizarre outfits appeared beyond that line of people.

There were five of them in all. They were all wearing black leather. They wore leather belts and black shirts over bare skin. The silver skull accessories and steel studs seemed to be their trademark.

But if that was all, it would not have been all that strange. All of their faces were painted white with black makeup on top of it. Their lips and the area around their eyes were dyed black and they scattered creepiness around them. They also had spells written in a magic language on their faces.

The five of them were holding instruments. They were a band with two guitar players. The vocalist who had long black hair let out a cry.

"You stand before the demon king! Bow your heads, you commoners!"

"Wha-!?"

Junko was utterly shocked and she looked over at Korone.

"They are demon king worshipers. Bands like this are known as black metal bands. Their extreme lyrics praise the demon king. They also dress like that as a type of fashion, but…"

Fujiko interrupted Korone's explanation.

"Th-that is the radical black metal band, Black Demon King!"

"You know them, senpai? That name is so pathetic I would expect to hear it at a dog race," commented Junko in shock.

However, Fujiko argued back with a serious expression.

"No, do not be led astray by the name! Black Demon King is not a band that does this for the fashion. Each of them is a true member of a black magic circle and they have all cast aside their baptism. Their leader even has a criminal record. They are a true black metal band that has only ever lost members due to them being arrested or being assassinated due to infighting between black magicians!"

"Geh… Is that true?"

"Yes. I still need to use magic, so not even I have cast aside my baptism. However, a true black magician will be so impatient for the demon king's arrival, that they will cast aside their baptism even if it means they are no longer able to use magic!"

"So…"

"Yes. Ever since that demon king war, the black magicians can use magic. That and the defeat of Suhara has brought their demon king worship to its max!" declared Fujiko. "Max!"

Peterhausen had functioned as a god for the black magicians. He had died, but it seemed he had activated some subsystem somewhere before falling into his slumber. Ever since, the unbaptized black magicians had continued to use illegal magic.

"So did they come here to meet the demon king?"

Black Demon King cut through the crowd and approached Café Bakhtin.

Their mana-driven instruments played in harmony. Their representative song, Triumphant Return of the Demon King, was playing loudly.

The knights tried to stop them, but they could not use magic for fear of harming the townspeople. The knights were quickly pushed back by a gathering of gothic lolita girls who were fans of Black Demon King.

<Stop them!>

The knight leader tried to give an order, but it was meaningless by that time.

Black Demon King spread out in front of the open terrace of Café Bakhtin. They had brought a drum set, so their preparations were complete. The vocalist bowed deeply toward Akuto.

"It is an honor to have an audience with the great demon king."

At that time, Akuto sat in a chair in the center of the open terrace and Keena Dorons was sitting on his lap.

From an outside perspective, he appeared to be calmly observing the surrounding chaos.

But in reality, Akuto was too preoccupied to focus on his surroundings.

A strange change had come over Keena. She seemed to be drunk, but she was also horribly cold to the touch. She almost felt frozen. This troubled Akuto so much he had picked her up and placed her on his lap.

"A-are you okay?" asked Akuto.

"Yes. I'm not in any pain. But…" replied Keena in a quiet voice.

She looked up at Akuto with a terribly sad look.

"What is it?"

"I want you to fall in love with me."

Those straightforward, pure, and earnest words stabbed directly into Akuto's chest.

But before he could provide an answer, his arms started to move.

—I'm not doing this… Is she doing it!?

He could once more feel the flow of mana he had felt during class.

Akuto's hands moved against his will. One gently brushed through Keena's hair and the other wrapped around her waist.

"You shouldn't control my hands," he said.

Keena looked confused.

"Eh?"

Keena did not appear to be lying, but Akuto's body slowly moved as if covering Keena. His face gradually approached her cheek.

Keena looked surprised. That expression was not one that could be faked.

—Is she doing it subconsciously!?

In his surprise, Akuto resisted and tried to bring his body back under his control. However, pouring a bit of strength into his body was not enough to move of his own accord.

—This isn't right. It isn't good for her.

As Keena's subconscious control continued, Akuto raised his voice.

"Get away!"

"Get away!? Oh, how cold! If we have done anything to offend you, please forgive us!"

The members of Black Demon King suddenly bowed down.

"Please find it in your heart to forgive us! We will do anything!"

Akuto was of course not listening.

Black Demon King had merely convinced themselves that a conversation was taking place.

"Get away? But you're moving toward me?"

"You are trying to control me without realizing it!"

"Everyone, cast aside your expectations! Having expectations for the demon king puts a burden on him! However, this means our desires have reached his ears!"

"I don't know…what to do…"

"Being lonely for so long has been a great burden. This needless power is an attempt to regain what was lost."

"The demon king has been lonely! He has been trapped in that academy! He has experienced terrible humiliation! But rest easy, everyone! The demon king is working to regain his lost power!"

"Lonely? I have?"

"You were looking at no one but me. You had convinced yourself that being accepted by me is all you needed to be happy."

"Exactly! We have been looking at no one but you, great demon king!"

"Ohhhhh! I can hardly believe it! The demon king knew of us!"

"But… That is because I love you."

"I know. But it isn't true. You have yet to learn who I really am."

"How wonderful! The demon king will show us his true power!"

"Ohhh! So even slaying a god was not his true power!? And now we will see his true power!?"

"Who you really are?"

"We do not need to rush this. We can create memories bit by bit from now on. I will be watching."

"That's right! It all starts here! The legend starts here!"

"We will create a nightmare that will remain in everyone's memories! We will create an unforgettable nightmare! The demon king is watching! He is watching everything in this world!"

"You will be…watching?"

"Yes. So listen to my desire. Do not try to use everything around you for your own purposes. Those feelings are restricting me."

"The demon king has commanded us to offer up everything we have! Hand over your money! Hand over your lives! Abandon it all for faith in the demon king!"

"Ohhhh! For the coming world! For the coming world!"

"I don't know what you mean…"

"Don't worry. We can start from here. Start by settling down."

With those words, Keena finally released her control over Akuto's body. She lost consciousness at the same moment. At this point, Akuto finally looked up and checked on his surroundings.

"He has commanded us to settle down!"

"We will settle down on this spot and create a beachhead for the coming world!"

"This open terrace belongs to Black Demon King! We will modify it into a permanent concert house! Outta the way, you cowardly knights! Listen to our performance praising the demon king and sink into the depths of despair!"

The members of Black Demon King began a magical musical performance.

"Wh-what?"

Akuto was dumbfounded by the further worsening of the situation, but it was already too late.

<Crush them! Don't worry about our drunk comrades! Blow them all away!> ordered the knight leader.

The knights fired attack magic, but Black Demon King's vocalist defended against it all with a great flash produced by his throat-crushing death shout.

"We can't embarrass ourselves in a fight in the presence of the demon king!"

<Don't falter! Continue fighting until reinforcements arrive!>

That small café in a quiet residential district became a battlefield.

Many sounds were heard: explosions, shouts, distorted guitar notes, continued confessions from the knights, accompanying slander, screams, and a chorus of protests.

Hatred and smoke whirled around and Akuto sat calmly in the center of it all with Keena in his lap. He was of course only motionless because he had no idea what to do, but others saw it as him effortlessly spreading chaos around him.

"Oh, how dreadful…"

"So this is the power of the demon king."

"His mere presence drives the knights to confusion and spreads chaos through his surroundings!"

Junko and the others heard those rumors spreading through the townspeople.

"This is horrible," muttered Junko as she looked around.

It seemed the knights were attempting to pin the blame for everything on the demon king so they could hide their scandals. The knights not taking part in the battle were mixing in with the townspeople and spreading rumors of their own.

"Do they know no shame?"

Junko began to draw her short sword, but Korone stopped her once more.

"No. We should focus on getting the two of them away from here. If you can cause a distraction, I can rescue them and return to the academy."

"A distraction? I guess I have to go on a bit of rampage."

Junko sounded angry, but Fujiko cut in.

"You should have no problem with a distraction," she said with an odd calm.

"Eh?"

Junko turned toward Fujiko to find the girl was smiling in embarrassment.

"The necklace is being overloaded. I am embarrassed to admit it, but it will lose control and explode before long. Oh ho ho…"

"So you gave him something dangerous without thinking of the consequences," muttered Junko in annoyance.

"No. I trusted Akuto-sama enough to know he would be fine. Ho ho ho."

Fujiko's ridiculous comment was followed by smoke from an explosion rising in Akuto's direction.

"Now!"

Korone raised a hand to show off the invisible sheet she held there.

"Invisible Cover! Anyone covered by this is invisible to those around them."

"You do not need to explain it."

"Just hurry up and go. We will be fleeing."

And shortly thereafter, Akuto and the others were gone.

However, the chaos remained.

No one died, but the total sum of the damages was said to be quite something. Café Bakhtin became famous as the location of the advent of the demon king. Demon king worshipers began to gather there, it began to fail financially, and the owner disappeared to go somewhere else. It was now a concert house that only black metal bands performed at.

"All I wanted to do was go on a date," complained Akuto.

Three girls were sitting seiza-style on the ground in front of him: Junko, Fujiko, and Korone. Junko had of course been the one to explain to Akuto what had happened.

"I am truly sorry this happened while I was with them."

Junko bowed down and Fujiko looked displeased.

"What do you mean 'while I was with them'? Please do not try to act like the good girl."

"What!? It was mostly your fault, senpai!" angrily shouted Junko.

Fujiko looked up at Akuto in a flattering way.

"You know I only did this for your sake, don't you, Akuto-sama?"

"The blame does not lie with any of us. It is his fault for not going to a companion café," murmured Korone.

"Do not be ridiculous! And you are his observer, so you should have done more!"

"An observer does not interfere."

"You should have this time! You were clearly enjoying it!"

"Ahh! Shut up, all three of you!"

Akuto was actually angry for once, so their apologies continued late into the night.

Chapter 2: I Want to Eat Rice Pudding

"Could you teach me how to have sex?"

Keena Dorons suddenly stuck her head in front of Akuto's face.

They were inside his dorm room during a day off. He had only just woken up.

Akuto had half sat up when he heard the door open, but Keena had jumped onto the bed.

"Eh?"

"I want you to teach me how to have sex," repeated Keena.

—Um…

Akuto calmed down his heart.

She did not seem to be trying to seduce him. He knew from Fujiko that a girl would act more suggestively if that were the case. Keena's face was pure innocence.

"I saw it in this magazine. It has a special feature on becoming beautiful with sex. I want to be more beautiful, so let's have sex."

Keena displayed a magazine on her student handbook's mana screen and showed it to Akuto.

It was a women's fashion magazine. It had precisely the special feature Keena had described.

"Well, if you read it…I guess you know what it entails…" said Akuto while feeling troubled.

Keena nodded in understanding and said, "I understand the theory behind it, but not enough to actually do it myself."

—The theory behind it? What theory is that?

"H-how much do you know?"

Akuto was unsure what to say, so he slid his finger across the mana screen to flip through the pages.

—Sure enough. It doesn't actually talk about the important parts.

It was an all-ages magazine, so it avoided any direct descriptions. The farthest it went was showing the naked upper bodies of a couple in a manga-style illustration.

"It seems to use a lot of technical terms. I didn't understand any of them, so I want you to tell me what they mean, too. For example, fe-…"

Keena started to say a dangerous term, so Akuto frantically drowned her out with a word of his own.

"Vermeer[2]. Johannes Vermeer is famous for The Milkmaid."

"That's it. Vermeer. Now that I think about it, it did say something about milk. It said guys loved it when you did it. And the opposite is cunn-…"

"Kundalini yoga. I believe it is supposed to revitalize the body. But it is also said to be dangerous."

"Ohh, you know a lot about this. Now I know why everyone calls you an expert at sex."

—People call me that?

This depressed Akuto a bit, but driving Keena out of his room came first.

"Um, well… Anyway, it isn't something you should do first thing in the morning."

"Eh? But this says you will become even more beautiful if you occasionally do it all day long."

—Honestly, what kind of magazine is this?

"Y-you're supposed to do this after getting married."

"That's odd. This says nothing about being married first. In fact, it says the dangerous thrill of doing it with people married to someone else makes you even more beautiful."

—This is getting more and more outrageous…

"Both people have to agree to it."

"Then please just tell me how to do it!"

Keena stuck her head out toward Akuto.

"Um, but…"

Akuto was at a complete loss for an answer when a voice spoke from above.

"I have heard the problem."

Korone stuck her head out past the door of the storage shelf near the ceiling. She slept there in Akuto's room during the night.

—I get the feeling this is only going to get more complicated.

But before Akuto could stop her, Korone hopped down to the bed and pulled a single rape flower from her bag.

"Are you listening? A flower has parts known as the stamen and the pistil…"

Korone began elementary sex education with a perfectly serious expression and Keena nodded with a serious expression of her own.

"Oh. And what do they do?"

"The stamen has pollen in it and that pollinizes the pistil."

"Okay, that's enough!"

Akuto got up and shoved Keena and Korone out of his room.

"Oh! How cruel, darling."

"I have barely begun with my explanation."

"Please give me a break. I want to think alone today," said Akuto.

He was not making up this desire to kick them out. That was what he really wanted to do.

"You want to think alone?" asked Korone and Akuto nodded.

"Sorry. Could you leave me alone during the morning at least?"

"But I am your observer, so I would like to know what you are thinking about."

Akuto thought on Korone's words before answering.

"A problem concerning my future. You could say it has to do with whether I will be able to graduate from this academy or not."

"That is serious. In that case, I will not let anyone in here during the morning," said Korone.

"Then I'll have Korone tell me how to have sex in that time! I'll be back in the afternoon to have sex!" announced Keena cheerfully.

"No, you don't have to do that. And…I would prefer it if you skipped on the explanation too," said Akuto.

Korone could obviously hear him, but she gave no response.

"You can become even healthier by using this," said Korone as she showed Keena a rod-shaped object that vibrated when she pressed a button.

Keena had fun waving it around while it vibrated.

"Oh! I get the feeling this could make you really healthy!"

Akuto's room was on the first floor. A yard existed outside his window. Korone and Keena were sitting there. They were of course discussing Korone's careless sex education.

"Wait… What are you doing with such an indecent object?" asked Fujiko as she walked over.

"This is not indecent at all. It is a massager."

"True. Those types of toys usually are labeled as joke goods."

Korone bringing out some strange object was nothing new, so Fujiko asked no further questions and changed the subject.

"Is Akuto-sama in his room?"

"He is, but he told me to keep everyone out until the afternoon."

"Is he still mad?"

"No, he said he wanted to think about an important decision concerning his future. I believe it includes deciding whether he will quit the academy or not."

"What?" Fujiko was shocked and she spoke the first thought that came to mind. "Then has he finally decided to become the demon king and unite with me!?"

"That I do not know."

Korone's response was cold, but Fujiko was not listening.

"Ho ho ho ho! This is my victory! Now, I must think about the future as well!"

"The future?" asked Keena curiously.

"Yes. Akuto-sama is certainly thinking about his future with me!"

"I don't know about the future, but darling is going to have sex with me this afternoon," said Keena innocently.

Fujiko froze over. Her cheek twitched as if she had heard something unbelievable.

"Wh-what did you say?"

"He's going to have sex with me! He'll put his seed inside me to impregnate me!" Keena was grinning. "We'll use tons of toys, too! And I'll perform fe…fe…whatever it's called and then drink his milk to make my skin glossy!"

"Wh-wh-whaaaaaat!?" shrieked Fujiko. She shook her head as if to deny it and pointed forcefully at Keena. "What are you talking about!? If you continue with this nonsense, I will tie you up and throw you in the Amazon River, you bitch!"

Keena looked completely confused.

"Oh! Where did that come from!? All I did was tell you my afternoon plans!"

"Those plans are obvious lies! If I go and ask Akuto-sama-…"

"No. He said no one can go in his room during the morning," said Keena.

Fujiko glared at the girl with bloodshot eyes. She then clapped her hands in realization and muttered to herself with the eyes of a crazed killer looking at her prey.

"That's right. If I can eliminate you during the morning, I do not need to check what Akuto-sama's intentions are."

"W-wait. What's going on?"

Keena must have sensed the danger because she stood up and began backing away.

"Be a good girl and let me kill you! It is all for the sake of my future with Akuto-sama!"

Fujiko swung up her right hand.

But an instant beforehand, Keena let out a cry and fired a ball of light. Fujiko had not been expecting resistance, so she was late to respond. She was blown away in an explosion.

"Kyaaah!"

Fujiko was blasted across the yard.

However, her wounds were light. The explosion had only burned away a portion of her clothes.

"N-now you've done it!"

As she stood up, Fujiko fired the same type of attack at Keena.

Keena avoided it just before it exploded and frantically ran off.

"Noooooo! What is going on!?"

"I came over because the boys' dorm's courtyard sounded noisy. What happened?"

Junko arrived in the courtyard a while after Fujiko began chasing Keena Dorons around. Korone alone sat in the courtyard.

"A conflict related to Sai Akuto began between Etou Fujiko and Keena Dorons," explained Korone.

"In that case, we have no choice but to have him stop them."

Junko pointed toward Akuto's room.

"No. He said not to disturb him during the morning."

"What a troublesome person. What is the problem with interrupting him?"

"This conflict is merely a trivial issue, but Sai Akuto is holed up in his room contemplating an important decision that includes whether he will quit the academy or not."

"Is that true?" asked Junko.

"Yes," replied Korone with a nod.

"W-wait a second. What is he so troubled about?"

"I do not know the details. He would not tell me," said Korone.

—I see. We may have put too much of a burden on him. But I wish he would discuss it with me… Come to think of it, any normal person would

end up holed up in their room if they were treated the way he is. I should probably try to help support him here.

"What are you muttering about?" asked Korone.

Junko looked up in surprise.

"N-nothing! I was just thinking we could get along well if I consoled him now…"

Junko then realized what she had said without thinking and she blushed.

"I see. You are free to do what you wish, but I will not let you in until the afternoon," said Korone.

Junko waved her hands in an attempt to avoid the issue.

"No, no, no! I was not… I was not planning anything like that. I swear. A-anyway, I just have to wait until the afternoon. No, first I need to stop those two. Ha ha. Ha ha…. Ha ha…"

Junko began walking away.

—I need to fix this habit of speaking my thoughts aloud. No, that does not matter. Right now, the fight between those two comes first… I-I know. If I find out what caused it, I should be able to stop it easily. Okay. That is what I will do. And to do that… I do not like it, but I need help from that stealth human. She can slip past Korone and get into his room.

Junko nodded to herself.

That stealth human was alone in her room with a tense expression on her face.

"Heh heh heh heh heh. I won't give anyone this valuable cup!"

She was grinning despite looking so nervous. Her red hair was waving around excitedly.

It was of course Soga Keena.

She was sitting in a chair looking at a white gelatin in a ceramic cup.

"This is the rice pudding made with the legendary Uonuma-made Koshihikari rice! They make so little of it that it's almost impossible to find! I finally got my hands on some!"

There were various recipes for rice pudding, but the simplest one was to make a rice porridge using milk that had sugar dissolved into it and then to cool it. When made that way, it tasted exactly as one would expect. It was commonly eaten in other countries, but it was not all that popular in the empire where rice was a staple food.

What Keena was looking at had the rice completely dissolved and used coconut milk, so it was quite well suited as a dessert. However, it was still not exactly popular. Keena had called it valuable, but one could also say so little of it was made because it was not popular.

However, almost everything had someone obsessed with it. On the rice mailing lists, rice message boards, and rice communities that Keena browsed, this maker's rice pudding was considered a legend. Keena had not been present for the incident at Café Bakhtin because she had been running around trying to acquire this.

"The deciding factor for rice pudding is the harmony between the sweetness of the rice and the sweetness of the sugar. But this adds in the sweetness of the coconut milk and the sweetness of fruit to bring out an exquisite harmony! Heh heh… Eh heh heh… I haven't even eaten any and I'm already drooling…"

Keena picked up the spoon.

"Now, without further delay…"

In that instant, the door to her dorm room opened.

"Keena, I have a favor to ask of you! Can you give me a hand?"

Junko entered the room.

"Fweh?"

Keena had been so focused on the rice pudding, that she misheard what Junko said. Or rather, she had not heard everything she said.

Keena, I have a favor to ask of you! Can you give me…?"

Can you give me…?

Can you give me your rice pudding?

"E-eeeee! Noooooo!"

She would not hand over the rice pudding. Keena quickly grabbed the cup and charged toward Junko who stood at the entrance.

"H-hey, what are you-…?"

Junko tried to stop Keena, but Keena threw her right leg forward, lowered her body, and used that dropping motion to throw her body forward. When her right foot reached the ground, her body did not rise back up. She dragged her left leg around in a half rotation and slipped right past Junko.

"Wha-!?"

Junko was utterly shocked.

She had been absolutely confident in her non-magical combat ability and yet Keena had slipped past her.

"Th-that was the Kobudo technique, Shukuchi!"

Shukuchi was a technique that allowed one to instantly move a distance of several paces by putting all of one's body weight on a leg that was brought forward.

Junko doubted Keena had mastered that technique. Later, Junko decided that the focus provided by Keena's attachment to the rice pudding had led her to instinctually choose the most suitable method of using her body in that moment. At any rate, Keena had slipped past Junko and she began running down the dorm hallway.

"Tch!"

Junko chased after her. Junko was of course the faster runner. However, Junko knew it would not be that easy.

"I knew it!"

Junko lost the instant Keena turned a corner.

Once Junko made it around the corner, she found Keena's clothes on the ground.

Now that the girl was invisible, Junko had no way of tracking her.

"Damn… But wait. Why did she run away?"

Keena hid behind a wall of the boys' dorm. She was naked except for the curtain wrapped around her. She had removed it from a random classroom window while fleeing.

"Junko-chan shouldn't pursue me to the boys' dorm. Now, I need to eat this rice pudding! I didn't expect to eat it outside, but rice pudding eaten under the blue sky has to be amazing."

While clearly almost drooling, Keena began to stick the spoon into the white pudding. But then…

An explosion occurred right next to her.

"Keenaaaaaa!" came a shout of anger in Fujiko's voice.

Fujiko herself then charged toward Keena.

"Ehhhhh!? Why!?"

Keena ran away. Fujiko had of course been shouting at the blonde Keena, but the red-haired Keena had no way of knowing that from the name alone.

"Wh-why is senpai after me, too?"

Keena stripped off the curtain, turned invisible, and ran off while holding the rice pudding cup.

"Keenaaaaa! Where did you go!?"

Fujiko searched for the blonde Keena with a monstrous look on her face.

"Sh-she really is looking for me… Ah! It can't be!"

Keena looked down at the rice pudding in her hand.

"It must have gotten out that I have this! I didn't know Junko-chan and senpai were both after it, too."

"Why are you chasing me!? If you want to join in on the sex this afternoon, the three of us can do it together!"

Keena Dorons fired spheres of light and lightly jumped around as she fled from Fujiko.

"A threesome? That might not be a bad idea… No, I cannot do that! Akuto-sama is mine and mine alone!"

Fujiko was not about to lose either. She was fiercely fighting back while pursuing Keena. By this point, Fujiko had gotten serious as well. Instead of using those spheres of light she was naturally unskilled with, she pursued Keena by using the small bottles of potion she walked around with. She put a chemical on Keena's clothes to act as a marker, used that to locate the girl, and fired spheres of light that automatically followed her.

Students began to gather as they noticed the commotion.

"What, what?"

"Fujiko-sama and the new student are fighting?"

"We have to help her! Our gentle Fujiko-sama would never begin fighting without a good reason!"

"That new student must have made some kind of mistake!"

The gathering students made comments like that and began assisting Fujiko.

"Wh-why are so many people gathering here?"

Keena was even more confused, but Fujiko's attitude suddenly changed.

"Everyone! This is dangerous, so please stay back! That girl suddenly attacked me! And while shouting obscene words no less! She is no different from a dangerous wild animal!"

Fujiko decided to feign innocence.

And of course, the gathered students believed Fujiko completely.

"I'll never forgive her!

"How could she do that to our graceful Fujiko-sama!?"

More people began shouting angrily and pursuing Keena. The fact that it was a day off meant the students still in the dorm had nothing better to do, so they began to take part in the festival.

"Wh-wh-what? Why? No! She's lying!" protested Keena, but no one was willing to listen to her.

She was like a hare being hunted by hounds.

"Nooooo! Why is this happening!?"

Keena continued to flee.

But something happened just as she stood still, conflicted over which way to turn at a corner.

"Hyah!"

Something invisible ran into Keena.

Needless to say, this invisible something was Soga Keena.

But Keena Dorons did not have time to stand around in confusion. Her pursuers were approaching. She frantically ran off.

"Ow ow…"

Soga Keena had fallen to the ground, but she had managed to not drop the rice pudding cup. She was lying on the ground completely naked and with her legs spread wide open, but that was no problem because she was invisible.

"Wh-whew… That was close."

Keena stood up to run away from the blonde Keena who was looking around wondering what had happened.

Then a crowd of students led by Fujiko arrived. They were of course after the blonde Keena, but the red-haired Keena was unfortunately not the type to think of that kind of thing.

"A-a lot of people are after this rice pudding!" said Keena with great force and conviction. "M-my only choice is to eat it as I run away…"

She gulped.

But then she shook her head.

"No! It would be rude to the artisan that that made it if I didn't eat it in the optimal conditions! A lot of effort went into making this ultimate snack!"

Keena then began focusing on running away.

"I need to find somewhere no one will go… I know! The roof is locked, so no one can go there!"

Keena gave up trying to run and flew into the air.

"Eating rice pudding on the roof! That has to be the best! Ahh, it will be white, smooth, and just a bit sweet. It will be like eating a cloud! Yes! The blue sky will suit that best! It will be like grated radish and sudachi on pacific saury! No, thinking about other foods will only dull my sense of taste! I know! It's as perfect a match as dew on a ladybug! I need to get as close to the sky as possible!"

Keena flew up into the sky as she spoke on and on.

"Ugh. They do nothing but cause problems."

Lily Shiraishi, the student council president, used the secret key only she had to open the door to the roof. She had wanted a large empty space. She had received a lot of complaints from the nearby townspeople due to the commotion in the town the day before. The knights had also gotten angry at her. All of it had irritated her, so she planned to let off some steam on a sandbag she had brought with her.

Most of the students could use flight magic, but they were honest enough to keep off of the roof when it was off limits. The roof had only been made off limits because a large hole had been created in it during the war. The rumor of Suhara's high priest dying there had conveniently made the area creepy enough that even those that could fly kept away from it.

"Good. No one here. Maybe I can just leave this here."

Lily lifted up the sandbag with telekinesis and hung it down from a pole stretching from the fence. She threw a few test punches into the air and then held her hands up.

"It's that guy's fault for going out into the town."

Lily hit the sandbag once.

It creaked and shook back and forth.

"I don't know what exactly happened, but I can make a pretty good guess. Etou Fujiko must have done something."

Punch, punch.

"And the knights!"

Punch, punch, punch!

"They have guts to blame a student in order to hide their own scandals!"

Punch, punch, punch, punch, punch, punch!

"Ahh, it pisses me off! Chewing calcium everyday just isn't enough!"

Punch punch punch punch punch punch punch punch punch punch punch punch punch!

Lily sent a barrage of punches at the sandbag with tremendous force.

And then Keena flew to the roof while invisible.

Keena had only heard the end of what Lily had said.

"Chewing calcium everyday isn't enough? And she's so focused on punching that sandbag. She must really want this! But how did word of this spread through the entire academy?"

Keena hid behind the water tower on the roof.

"That way, Fujiko-sama!" shouted a student while pointing toward the roof.

"So she ran that way."

Fujiko began running up the stairs.

Fujiko and the others were following the marker placed on Keena Dorons's clothes. However, that marker was now attached to Soga Keena's body. And Fujiko and the others were completely unaware of this fact.

"She went to the roof? But it's off limits."

Fujiko and the others realized the door to the roof was locked.

"That does not matter. It is off limits because the large hole is being repaired. If she is hiding here, she is as good as cornered!"

Fujiko's words motivated the students to blow down the door with magic.

With an explosion, the door slid out onto the roof.

"Let's go!"

Fujiko and her followers surged out onto the roof. Her followers numbered exactly twenty.

"Where are you!?

"Come out!"

"We won't let you escape!"

The twenty of them spread out across the roof. One of them stepped on the door that had been blown away a moment before. He realized the door felt odd under his feet. The door then began to move.

"W-wah!" he cried out and jumped off of it.

A figure slipped out from under the door. In other words, this person had been pinned under the door when it was blasted from its hinges.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

It was of course Lily Shiraishi who lifted the door up and slipped out from under it.

The veins in her forehead were bulging out. She glared at the students with a lovely expression that would have made even a starving wild dog run away.

Lily was the most skilled in the academy (in fights) and was the student council president, so she was obviously not your average student. Her fearsomeness was well known throughout the school. The students' all had the expression of someone who found out the supposed friend they teased was actually a yakuza member.

"W-wait… We didn't realize you were there. We never would have thought you would be here."

"What? Are you saying you didn't notice me because I'm so small?"

The student had meant nothing of the sort, but Lily was extremely bothered by how short she was.

"N-no… I didn't say that…. S-sorry. I'm the type of person that doesn't think about little issues like that…"

The student accidentally hit Lily precisely where it hurt.

"Y-y-you bastards…"

She had been irritated even before any of this happened, so Lily was already reaching up for the brim of her stylish hat. Turning that hat backward was the sign that Lily was truly angry.

"You aren't leaving here alive!"

She reversed the hat.

In the very next instant, twenty students flew up into the air. Lily's arms grew in number like the thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara and each one stretched out like it was made of rubber. Every one of the students was hit by about 10 punches instantly.

"If it were night, you would have all become new constellations. You're lucky it's daytime."

As soon as Lily finished speaking, the students slammed down headfirst onto the roof.

Lily then glared at the one remaining person.

"Ho… Ho ho ho… I think you have made a sma-…slight misunderstanding."

Fujiko tried to laugh it off.

Fujiko was not about to pick a direct fight with someone stronger than the three student council officers.

"You almost said small just now, didn't you?"

Lily continued giving herself a reason to fight.

"Heh…heh heh… In that case, you leave me no choice. Everyone is unconscious, so I can go all out!"

Fujiko grew defiant when she realized she could not flee. In the span of a breath, she removed her school uniform. A bondage-style leather suit appeared underneath.

"Cerberus!" called out Fujiko and a giant dog quickly appeared on the rooftop.

The demonic beasts had quieted down quite a bit since the war, but Fujiko was raising one she had grown fond of.

"Damn you. You have guts to oppose me."

"This may not have been my intention, but I will not hold back! Oh, I know. If I win, I will take your position as student council president!"

Both of them had already forgotten why they were fighting.

Lily and Fujiko glared at each other while the latter straddled the Cerberus.

Tension swelled up in the atmosphere between them. If someone had given a sign, they would have moved simultaneously. However, someone entered through the broken door before that happened.

"Senpai! I heard what is going on from Korone and Dorons! What are you doing!?"

Junko stepped out onto the rooftop along with Keena Dorons.

Junko had run into Keena Dorons while pursuing Soga Keena and had asked the blonde girl about the situation. Keena had simply said that Fujiko suddenly attacked her.

Junko could not make heads or tails of how Lily and Fujiko had ended up glaring at each other.

"Wh-what are you doing?" she asked again.

Incidentally, Lily and Fujiko also no longer knew the details behind this fight.

"Hmph. We were arguing over what to eat for dinner."

That was one of Lily's first class jokes. And Fujiko enjoyed sarcasm, so she joined in.

"It seems the president is the type who insists on eating quite a lot. She said she wants her breasts to grow as soon as possible."

"That's it. You're dead."

Lily's expression grew even more ghastly. Any child that saw it would have been traumatized for life.

"Wait, you two. I cannot overlook this."

Junko tried to cut in between them, but Lily threw a jab with an extended arm.

The fist struck Junko's forehead. She had held back in order to warn Junko away.

But…

"Stop it. You couldn't stand up to me when we fought underground."

Junko had been staggering and crouching down, but Lily's words brought flames to her eyes.

"President. Take back those words! I am not the same as I was. I will take part in this fight over what to eat for dinner!"

Junko smoothly drew something at her waist. It was her family's treasure, the Sword of Sohaya. The sword had been given transcendent power from the god Suhara. Its power had dropped quite a bit with the god gone, but it was still a first class sword. Its ability to boost its user's mana still worked just fine.

A rainbow-colored sparkle ran across the blade and Junko's body was surrounded by mana.

That extraordinary intimidating atmosphere made Lily get serious as well.

"I like the look in your eyes! And that power! This looks like fun! You can both come at me at once!"

Wind blew wildly through that concrete hill. Three beautiful girls stood among several unconscious students. They were all enveloped in different types of elegance and strength and their bodies were tense in preparation for the coming battle.

The scene made quite a nice picture. All of them had forgotten why they were fighting. However…

"Yaaaaahh!"

Unsurprisingly, Lily threw the first blow. She had not been lying when she said she would fight both of them at once. Repeated attacks from her extending arms flew toward both Fujiko and Junko.

"Avoid them!"

Fujiko gave an order to the Cerberus and left the rest up to the beast's reaction speed. The giant three-headed dog did not falter when faced with multiple simultaneous attacks. It splendidly stepped to the left and right to avoid them.

Meanwhile, Junko created multiple copies of herself with mana. Four copies were destroyed by Lily's fierce assault. However, the real Junko was no longer there.

"Tch!"

Lily searched for Junko.

"Normally, she would be up above…but she's actually below!"

Lily managed to sense the flow of mana and locate Junko at the last second. She hopped up to avoid the attack meant to sweep her feet out from under her.

"Can you avoid this!?"

Junko had used mana to create a sheet camouflaged as the concrete floor and attacked while hiding underneath it. After that supposedly surefire attack was avoided, Junko's crouched position left her open to attack.

"Heh!"

Lily tried to throw a punch straight down, but Fujiko took action before she could.

"You have more than one opponent!"

Fujiko swung her whip toward Lily. She had waited until Lily had jumped into the air, but that was not a true opening for someone who could use mana to fly. Lily stopped in midair and sliced through the whip with a mana-covered karate chop.

"Oh, no! …is what you wanted to hear, isn't it? But I am not the physical type."

Having the whip cut was part of Fujiko's plan. She threw the whip toward Lily. The whip wrapped around the president as if it had a will of its own.

"What!? You had this prepared ahead of time!?" cried Lily in surprise.

The whip wrapped around her body and she groaned in pain.

"Ho ho ho ho! You cannot win if you simply come straight in for the attack!"

Fujiko laughed victoriously.

"You coward! Don't rely on tools! Use your bare hands! Come at me with your bare hands!" complained Lily.

She could still extend her arms, but she could not create the speed needed for a punch because she could not use her shoulders. Fujiko used the Cerberus to easily evade the attacks.

"Using one's bare hands is so uncivilized! And when you are bound like that, you are supposed to provide some fan service with your breasts being squeezed out through the gaps in the whip, but it looks like that is impossible with your body type. Ho ho ho."

"Ugaaah! I'm gonna cry! I really am!" wailed Lily, but Fujiko only laughed.

But then her laugh froze over.

"Know some shame!"

With that shout, the whip was sliced apart and Lily's body was freed. Before Fujiko could even be surprised, someone was suddenly standing

atop one of the Cerberus's heads even as the beast moved around. Junko stood in an imposing stance looking down at Fujiko.

"I have wanted to tell you a few things for a while now!"

"Yes. And how seriously you take everything really pisses me off!"

Fujiko quickly tried to attack, but the Cerberus staggered and Junko had to move away.

"Either way, I just have to take both of you out!"

Lily sent her fists flying randomly toward both Fujiko and Junko.

"Please do not joke!" roared Fujiko as the Cerberus dashed around.

"If you want a battle, you have one!"

Junko created copies of herself so she could face both Lily and Fujiko. Lily responded to them head on and Fujiko had the Cerberus move around throughout the fray.

The battle intensified, the situation grew more confused, and chaos filled the rooftop.

And two people were watching over it all.

They were the two Keenas.

The red-haired Keena had made a strange misunderstanding as she watched it all from her hiding spot.

"Ahh! This rice pudding is causing so much trouble! This must be the dinner they were talking about! Ahh, what am I supposed to do!? This wonderful rice pudding is causing friends to fight each other! I never knew how painful it was to not have peace throughout the world!"

As Keena acted like a tragic heroine, she held up the rice pudding cup while in the pose of a praying maiden.

"H-how did this end up happening!?"

Meanwhile, the blonde Keena stood dumbfounded where she had been left on the roof after arriving with Junko.

And to make it worse, the effects of the battle reached her.

"Kyah!"

Concrete fragments rained down on her.

She covered herself with her hands, but a small stone still struck her forehead.

"Ow!"

Keena brought a hand to her forehead and a small amount of blood stuck to her fingers.

"Blood! Noooo! Ow! Noooo!"

Keena began shouting and crying as soon as she noticed the blood.

However, the three fighting did not notice.

Lily deflected some fire the Cerberus breathed out and a portion of it flew toward Keena.

"Watch out!"

Keena's body was knocked to the side. The red-haired Keena had tackled her while invisible to protect her from the spray of flames.

"Kyaaah!"

The sudden action had surprised Keena. Finally, the other three noticed what was happening.

"Hm?'

"What?"

"What is it?"

The three girls turned toward where the blonde Keena had fallen to the ground. The red-haired Keena was also beginning to appear.

"Stop!" cried the red-haired Keena as she spread her arms in the pose of a maiden stopping a war. "Stop fighting! Please! I beg you!"

She was crying. The other three may have been girls as well, but a girl's tears still held some power.

"B-but I am fighting to right a wrong," mumbled Junko.

"But Doro-chan is hurt!"

Keena's rebuttal silenced Junko, but Fujiko refused to give in.

"This all started with her attitude!"

Lily had merely gotten wrapped up in it all, but she was not going to back down so easily.

"I can't sit idly by after being suddenly blown away."

"Stop! I know what you're fighting over! So…" Keena kneeled down and held out the rice pudding cup. "Let's share this! Isn't that good enough!?"

The three girls looked at the cup suspiciously.

"…What are you talking about?"

"Also…"

"What is that?"

"What are you saying!? This is the rice pudding! It's the ultimate product made from the legendary Uonuma-made Koshihikari rice! The rice has been filtered until it is smooth and has been perfectly matched with the milk! Its sublime flavor is said to make you feel like you're ascending into heaven! Its flavor is superb! Even that Rosanjin praised this ultimate meal by saying 'every day should begin with rice pudding and every day should also end with rice pudding'! It received 1st place on a newspaper sponsored survey of the final thing you would want to eat before dying!"

As Keena lost herself in explaining, the other three could do nothing but exchange a glance.

"Rice…pudding?"

"I've never eaten it."

"Simply put, it is milk rice porridge. The unsweetened ones taste exactly like that while the sweetened ones are made like candy, so they are not much different from a normal pudding," explained Fujiko indifferently.

Lily looked toward Fujiko mockingly.

"That's what caused all this? You blew down the door to the roof for that?"

"Of course not! This is obviously another one of that girl's ridiculous misunderstandings!"

"It probably is, but… Ahh! This all seems so foolish now."

Junko sighed and sheathed her sword.

"We can leave this until later."

Lily's shoulders drooped.

"Yes. You can leave now, Cerberus."

Fujiko sent Cerberus back to its lair and put on her uniform.

"Thank goodness! You all understood! Now, let's eat it! Together!"

Keena began trying to figure out how to cleanly divide the rice pudding into five equal servings, but the other three passed right by her.

"I will be going now."

"You can have it all yourself."

"If I really wanted some, I would buy it with the student council's budget."

Keena glanced around in confusion.

"Eh? Then I can have it to myself? Oh, but you want some, right, Doro-chan?"

Keena turned toward the blonde Keena who had been crying. The blonde Keena's eyes were now glittering innocently as she looked at the rice pudding. As usual, she could be ridiculously pure. It seemed she had believed every word of the red-haired Keena's explanation.

"Y-you'll really share something that amazing with me!? You really will?"

"Sure. Let's eat it together."

The two Keenas nodded at each other.

And then someone else appeared on the roof.

"Huh? I thought I heard a commotion. Is everyone okay?"

Akuto stuck his head out of the broken door. Junko, Fujiko, and Lily were surprised to see him.

"Ah."

"Akuto-sama!"

"What are you here for?"

This did not change much for Lily, but it reminded Junko and Fujiko of the original reason for the fight.

"H-hey, I heard you were worried about your future! Why did you not come ask me about it?"

"Akuto-sama! You decided on a happy future with me, didn't you!?"

Junko and Fujiko rushed toward Akuto.

Akuto then gave a confused apology.

"Eh? I apologize if you misunderstood something. I just wanted some time to think on my own. That was all."

"And what did you want to think about? I heard it was an important issue related to your future."

"No. I felt bad about what happened to the owner of Café Bakhtin. His café was destroyed because of me and he might still be unemployed because of it. I was thinking about sending him some money."

"But Akuto-sama, you are not wealthy, are you? Wouldn't that be quite a large sum of money?"

"That's why I was thinking about asking the headmaster to lend me the wages I would earn after graduating. I wouldn't be able to stand it otherwise. I took some time to think and drew up a tentative schedule for repaying the loan."

"What!? I cannot allow you to work, Akuto-sama! If this is what you want, then I will pay! I can pay 100 million or even 200 million if need be!" said Fujiko as she embraced Akuto.

Junko then spoke loudly to drown out and oppose her.

"I-If that is the case, then some of the responsibility lies with me. I can have my family pay for it."

As both girls insisted on paying, Akuto shook his head.

"No. I thought about it and decided we can't rely on our parents' money just because we are students. Also, I do not want to use any money dyed in the colors of a certain family. Relying on the Hattori family was part of what caused everything that happened before."

"Th-then…"

"Unless I earn it myself or acquire it by chance, any money I use will be dyed in certain political colors, right? It has to be me that does something about this."

Despite what Akuto said, Fujiko and Junko refuse to back down.

"No! I will gather money for you in secret!"

"Senpai, I don't think anyone wants that kind of dirty money."

"What are you talking about!? It is better than using our parents' money, isn't it?"

"Maybe, but I still think it is my personal responsibility to make up for what happened to the café."

"No, it is not! That was all Keena Dorons's fault! Speaking of which, it was Dorons's ridiculous attitude that caused this fight as well."

"That reminds me! I heard you were bullying Dorons, so I came to stop you."

Fujiko and Junko looked like they would explode at the slightest provocation.

Akuto looked troubled. In hopes of help, he turned toward Lily who had the most authority of those on the roof. However, she shook her head in annoyance and quickly left as if to say, "Not my problem."

Fujiko and Junko were still shouting back and forth when Soga Keena stepped between them. She was naked except for the top layer of a school uniform.

"Don't fight! If we all eat the rice pudding together, it will solve everything! We can all get along!"

Keena's point of view was as ridiculous as ever.

Fujiko and Junko had no intention of responding to her, but when they glanced over, they saw Keena Dorons eating the rice pudding they were sharing.

"Ohhh! This is delicious! Who would have thought there was a way to make rice this delicious! This really is lovely! Now we can all get along!"

From what she was saying now, it seemed Keena Dorons had completely forgotten about the topic of sex.

The piece of clothing Soga Keena wore belonged to Keena Dorons. It seemed she had lent it to her after they started to get along.

"C'mon, let's get along! It's really good, so try some!"

Junko and Fujiko took the cup and spoon held out to them and each took a bite in turn.

And they both made wonderful grimaces.

"This is an…odd taste," commented Junko.

"No, just come out and say it. This is terrible," said Fujiko.

"Ehh? It's good? Right? Right?"

Keena passed the cup to Akuto. It had only one bite left.

Akuto hesitated and then took a bite. He shook his head.

"Sorry, but this is a strange flavor… Huh?"

Akuto had spotted some writing at the bottom of the cup.

"Winner?"

The word "winner" was indeed written on the bottom of the cup.

"Ahhh! We did it! We won!" cried Soga Keena ecstatically. "Another reason this rice pudding is so popular is because of the contest. You almost never win, but the prize is huge."

"The prize?"

"Yeah. The amount of money accumulates as long as no one wins. Right now I think it's…50 million."

Keena casually made that amazing announcement.

Keena put the cup in Akuto's hand as everyone else looked on in shock.

"You said money you acquired by chance is fine, right? You were the last one to eat it, A-chan, so this is yours."

Akuto was completely dumbfounded, but Keena was completely calm.

"See, the rice pudding brought peace. That's why everyone should eat rice pudding together!"

Afterwards, rice pudding became incredibly popular among the students who had heard the rumor.

However, none of them were able to eat rice pudding every day. The two Keenas were seen as useful because they were the only two in the academy able to eat the rice pudding.

A large quantity of rice pudding was brought into the school, but no one won the prize and the boom passed.

"They call it the mysterious rice pudding…"

Akuto had managed to send a letter and the winning cup to the owner of Café Bakhtin. He felt bad making this comment after benefiting from the rice pudding.

"…but isn't it because it tastes so bad that it became known as a mystery and that the prize accumulated so high?"

Chapter 3: Literature is Difficult?

The two Keenas seemed to have grown quite close. It may have been due to the rice pudding.

This made things a lot easier for Akuto. The amount of time Keena Dorons spent around him had dropped considerably. However, that did not mean the number of commotions had dropped as well.

"Doro-chan, this book tells the story of something that really happened a long time ago."

"Really!? I should be able to learn a lot from that!"

Soga Keena had recently begun reading books to Keena Dorons. The blonde Keena was a too-honest reader who believed everything the books said.

—What are they reading now?

Akuto glanced over out of curiosity and saw the title of an old entertainment novel about psychic powers. It was the story of a psychic network being constructed to oppose an evil spirit attacking from space.

—At the very least, I know this is not a true story.

But the blonde Keena seemed to fully believe anything that was written down. In this case, the red-haired Keena believed it too, so the effect was doubled.

"The earth is under attack, isn't it!?"

"Yes. If you don't have a pure heart, the evil spirit can possess you."

The two Keenas nodded at each other.

It seemed Keena Dorons's insistence on being high society when she had first transferred in was due to believing a special feature in a magazine she had read. Based on her confession while drunk, it seemed someone had given her magazines to educate herself with when she was taken in by the knights.

At any rate, the recent commotions were mostly caused by Keena being affected by the books and magazines she read. When she was reading

detective stories, she began investigating people and caused an incident when she revealed a teacher's hidden possessions.

—Well, a psychic hero story shouldn't be too much of a problem.

"According to the characteristics of the possessed people described in the story, Mitsuko-sensei might be possessed by the evil spirit! We need to purify her!"

—I take that back. This is a big problem.

"That isn't a true story," cut in Akuto.

"Ehh!?"

The blonde Keena's eyes opened wide in complete surprise.

"You shouldn't do that, A-chan. You need to read books as if they are true," complained the red-haired Keena.

"That doesn't work with fiction," said Akuto with a smile.

However, Keena shook her head.

"No. Books create an original world, so it is good manners as a reader to not bring your knowledge of the real world into the book with you. Looking for a moral in every story or trying to make what you read useful in the real world would make you look stupid, right? Using your knowledge to make fun of the story is the same thing."

Her tone was calm and foolish-sounding, but what she was saying was actually fairly difficult.

—Come to think of it, Keena has pretty good grades in everything but magic.

Akuto nodded in admiration.

"I see. In that case, I was wrong. But that means you need to warn Dorons-san if she tries to emulate the book in the classroom."

"She's learning that bit by bit, so don't worry. Doro-chan is a good girl. If she learns to deny what books say from the very beginning, she'll end up not reading books at all," said Keena with an innocent smile.

"You two really like books," commented Akuto.

The two girls nodded. The blonde one's nod was especially vigorous.

"The stories are so much fun."

In the modern age, most books were digital. The network accessible through the student handbooks was enough to browse a massive amount of written material. However, that had not caused an increase in readers. Having all that data at one's fingertips did not bring about any desire to browse through past data. This was especially true for novels that were unnecessary in everyday life. Unlike with academic papers, there was very little meaning in viewing items from the past.

The digital novels written by modern authors were usually read as a onetime event. Once everyone had read them, they were used as conversational topics and to feel as if one fit in. For example, people would discuss what their favorite books or movies were online to show off their individuality.

However, this was sadly unnecessary for Akuto. He was the kind of person who saw no need for books. He viewed novels as nothing more than books expressing ideals in their themes. However, he was greatly interested in what Keena was thinking for the sake of analyzing the present situation.

"I suppose people who think the gods really do exist might try to find morals and teachings in the novels they read," he said.

The red-haired Keena nodded and the blonde Keena tilted her head.

At that point, someone else interrupted.

"Sorry for interrupting your odd conversation, but the next class is about to begin. It is a hands-on lesson. This one will use groups of three, so you, Keena Dorons, and I can make a group."

This comment was made by Junko.

Ever since they had learned Keena Dorons could control Akuto's power, Junko had stopped being afraid to perform magic lessons with him. After all, Akuto no longer lost control of his power.

"Today, we will be doing hands-on lessons in groups of three. We will be using potions to affect living creatures," said Mitsuko-sensei.

Class began after they moved to the practice room. In front of each group of three was a case with a frog inside and bottles of a few types of potions.

"Make the potion, alter it with magic, and then put it on the frog. Afterwards, you can see if it has the proper effect. You are in groups of three because we do not have enough frogs for everyone, so take turns. Make a potion that changes the outward color of the frog. Try to create the color you picture in your head," explained Mitsuko-sensei.

However, Junko cowered down a bit and her expression stiffened. She was clearly nervous.

"What is it?" whispered Akuto out of concern.

With him losing control out of the picture, there should have been nothing to worry about.

"N-nothing… I am fine. Yes, perfectly fine. More importantly, do not mess this up," said Junko in a trembling voice.

In truth, Junko was afraid of the frog. Akuto had actually been told this before, but he had completely forgotten.

"I will picture the color in my mind and transfer that pattern to the potion. I shouldn't lose control then," said Akuto.

"Don't worry. I'll make sure you don't mess up," said Keena confidently.

"S-sure. Go ahead. Go right ahead," said Junko with a trembling nod.

"Actually, I'm not very confident. Could you go first, Hattori-san?" asked Akuto.

Junko heard Akuto's words, but their meaning did not hit her until a moment later.

"O-oh, right. Sure. It is a simple spell, so just watch."

Junko picked up potion and cast the spell. Transferring her mental image was handled by an automated program in the mana, but the coloration would not fully apply unless that image was distinct. It required practice and there was a trick to it.

After casting the spell, Junko tried to hand the potion to Akuto.

"H-here. I did it."

"W-wait a second. If I touch it, the images will mix together, right?"

Akuto stepped back so as not to touch the potion bottle.

"N-not if you do not picture anything in your head."

"You know it won't work out that conveniently. And this is a hands-on lesson, so you have to do it yourself."

Akuto was oddly diligent but also terrible at catching on. After everything she had said, he should have realized that Junko did not want to touch the frog, but he had a way of not picking up on that sort of thing. On top of that, Junko was stubborn, so she absolutely refused to say she did not want to even approach the frog.

"Right. I-I understand that. I do."

Junko froze on place.

"What is it? Hurry up and do it," urged Keena.

Keena was more innocent than dense, but she had not caught on either. She had seen the other students' frogs changing color, so she could hardly wait to see it up close.

"Yes. I understand. I understand. Okay, here I go. Here I go!" Junko placed a hand on the lid to the case. "I am opening the lid!"

"You don't have to give a running commentary."

Keena gave a perfectly reasonable comment, but Junko was too preoccupied to listen.

"Once I open the lid, I have to drip the potion onto the frog so it permeates its body."

She dripped the potion down from her trembling hand.

However, her hand was well above the frog. In fact, it was 30 centimeters above the case.

The frog was only ten centimeters across, so there was no way she would hit it.

At this point, even Akuto should have realized Junko was afraid of the frog. However…

"Are you trying to make this harder because it's such an easy lesson?"

That was his interpretation.

And Keena was not going to allow it.

"Just splash the potion on it! Like this!"

Keena swiftly grabbed Junko's arm and tugged it toward the frog.

The case shook and the shock caused the frog to cutely jump up. And it grabbed onto Junko's hand that was still holding the potion bottle.

"Pyaaaaaah!"

Junko literally jumped. She dropped the potion bottle into the case and shook her hand vigorously, but the frog continued clinging to her fingers and would not let go.

"N-n-n-nooooooooo!"

Junko raised her hand and swung it around.

"Oh, that's right. Hattori-san is afraid of frogs."

Akuto finally caught on. And once he did, he quickly took action. He grabbed Junko's arm and tried to remove the frog. However, Junko continued struggling even as he held her arm.

The frog that had been sticking to her fingers must have decided this pause in the motion of her fingers was a good time to flee. It jumped straight up into the air.

And after that, it of course fell.

The frog fell down the back of Junko's neck and slipped right under the collar of her shirt.

"H-h-hyaaaah! Slipperyyyyyy!"

Junko began to wriggle around violently. Akuto grabbed Junko to stop her.

"Calm down. The frog isn't going to harm you."

"Th-that is not the issue… Hyah! I-it's going innnnn!"

Junko continued wriggling while blushing in Akuto's arms.

"W-wait. Stop struggling."

Akuto could not hold Junko too strongly. He might crush the frog if he did. He felt around, but he could not find the frog.

"Where is the frog?"

"M-my back! My back!"

Akuto circled around Junko's struggling body and checked her back. He saw a faint green shadow in her shirt.

"I can't just stick my hand in here… Oh, I know. We can use that precision manipulation from class the other day."

Akuto glanced over at Keena.

Keena nodded and seemed to understand what he meant.

"Leave it to me! We're using that precision manipulation from class the other day, right!?"

By having Keena control Akuto's mana, they had succeeded in stacking cubes the size of grains of powder. If they could do the same thing, removing the frog from Junko's clothes would be easy.

Keena touched Akuto's hand.

"I'll control your mana!"

With those words, Keena had Akuto perform the precise work with his mana.

However, this was a two-man activity. If they were not working toward the same purpose, it was meaningless. And in this case, Keena had completely misunderstood Akuto's intention. And Akuto was unable to stop her.

"This will solve everything!" announced Keena as she sent all of Junko's clothes flying up into the air.

It was a truly splendid undressing. None of the clothes were torn, the buttons were undone, the hooks were removed, and the zippers were lowered. The rubber of her panties was stretched to lower them without resistance.

"K-kyaaaah!"

Junko let out a scream for a different reason than before.

Her nude body was splendidly displayed and a stir ran through their classmates.

"How did this happen during such a simple lesson?"

"Now that's a demon king! He strips her for no reason!"

As the boys began looking on with great interest, Akuto frantically removed his coat.

"Ah! W-wait…"

But just as he tried to place that coat over Junko, it caught on one of the other potion bottles sitting on the table.

"Ah!"

The bottle clattered as it fell over. It rolled and dumped the potion on Junko's head where she had crouched down.

"Oh, no…"

"Ee!" shrieked Junko at how cold it was.

But the true shock came soon thereafter.

Akuto had already transformed that potion. Junko's white skin visibly began to turn gold.

"Th-this is a gold dust show[3]!"

The commotion among the students grew. This time, it was the girl as well as the boys.

"Exhibitionism! I can't believe it!"

"This goes beyond horrible. It's almost amazing…"

"Is this an adult eroticism of a previous age?"

The commotion poured down on Junko after she had been transformed into a golden statue.

"S-such humiliation…"

Junko wrapped her arms around herself and began to cry.

Akuto finally succeeded in placing his coat over her, but that did nothing but cause her anger to surge out.

"Y-y-y-you idiot!"

Junko's golden punch struck Akuto.

"I cannot believe I am being punished as well," complained Junko.

"Sorry. I'll try to do most of the work," apologized Akuto admirably.

"But taking off your clothes is the best way of getting a frog out! Ha ha ha," laughed Keena Dorons.

The three of them were headed for the old library. As punishment for disrupting class, they had been ordered to clean the library and sort the books.

The old library contained paper books. Books that had yet to be digitized were gathered and then turned into data. Instead of discarding the paper books afterwards, they were stored while kept off limits. 20 million such books had been collected.

"The books we need to sort are the most recent ones, right?" asked Junko to change the subject.

Keena answered by reciting what she had read.

"Only a very small number of people want to own actual books. The number of books published for those people is small, but they are still

collected. Some of those are digitized and some are not. A lot of the time, the author has not given permission to have the book digitized. That is why modern paper books are usually not digitized and end up in storage forever without being sorted."

"And so we need to sort them and clean up."

"Yes. We are librarians right now."

Keena sounded delighted. She probably could barely wait to touch a paper book.

"I'd heard that people who love books ultimately insist on having paper ones," muttered Akuto and Keena nodded happily.

"That's right! I've never touched a real one, but I'm still really excited! I feel like this is the real, real deal!"

"The real, real deal? The only person I know of that insists on real books is Etou-senpai, but I suppose something you can actually touch would seem more real than simple data. What we read is the writing though, so we get the same information either way."

—The information we read will never gain any real form. But would the information stored by the gods become real humans if the world were reconstructed?

That thought suddenly came to Akuto. He had heard from Bouichirou during that war that information could gain real form as long as the Law of Identity existed.

—What world do we truly live in? That's probably something we cannot know from the inside.

And it seemed the Law of Identity was a term referring to Soga Keena. Or more accurately, it referred to some kind of will that would suddenly awaken within her.

"What is with the distrust we have of digitized data? Can we only rely on originality?"

Akuto had been speaking to himself, but Junko tilted her head.

"Sometimes I have no idea what you are talking about. Actually, it happens a lot more than sometimes."

However, Keena Dorons greatly reacted to his words.

"Originality! That's it! That's what I want. Even if I have no memories, I can surely become myself if I read a bunch of books!"

Keena smiled innocently, but for some reason Akuto felt an emotion similar to sadness when he heard it.

Meanwhile, Fujiko had been called in by Korone.

"This is a rare pairing."

Fujiko had entered an empty classroom. Korone had asked her to keep all the students away.

"Indeed. Actively becoming involved in your actions seems as if it would bring a lot of secret information to light. I decided I did not want to increase my workload unnecessarily."

Korone's words were terrible, but she spoke them with perfect calm.

Fujiko of course did not look pleased.

"Yes, you are strictly on the government's side. But I assume you did not call me here to provoke me. It would have to be something important if you are willing to leave Akuto-sama's side while he is taking such an irregular action."

"Yes. I would like to exchange information."

"Regarding Keena Dorons?" asked Fujiko.

Korone nodded.

"Yes. You were joking around during that date, but I am sure you have gathered a fair bit of information on her."

"Of course. But unfortunately, I do not know very much."

"Neither do I. That is why I would like to try a certain method that would be impossible without the two of us working together."

"In other words, you want the black magicians' logs on people's actions. The illegal ones."

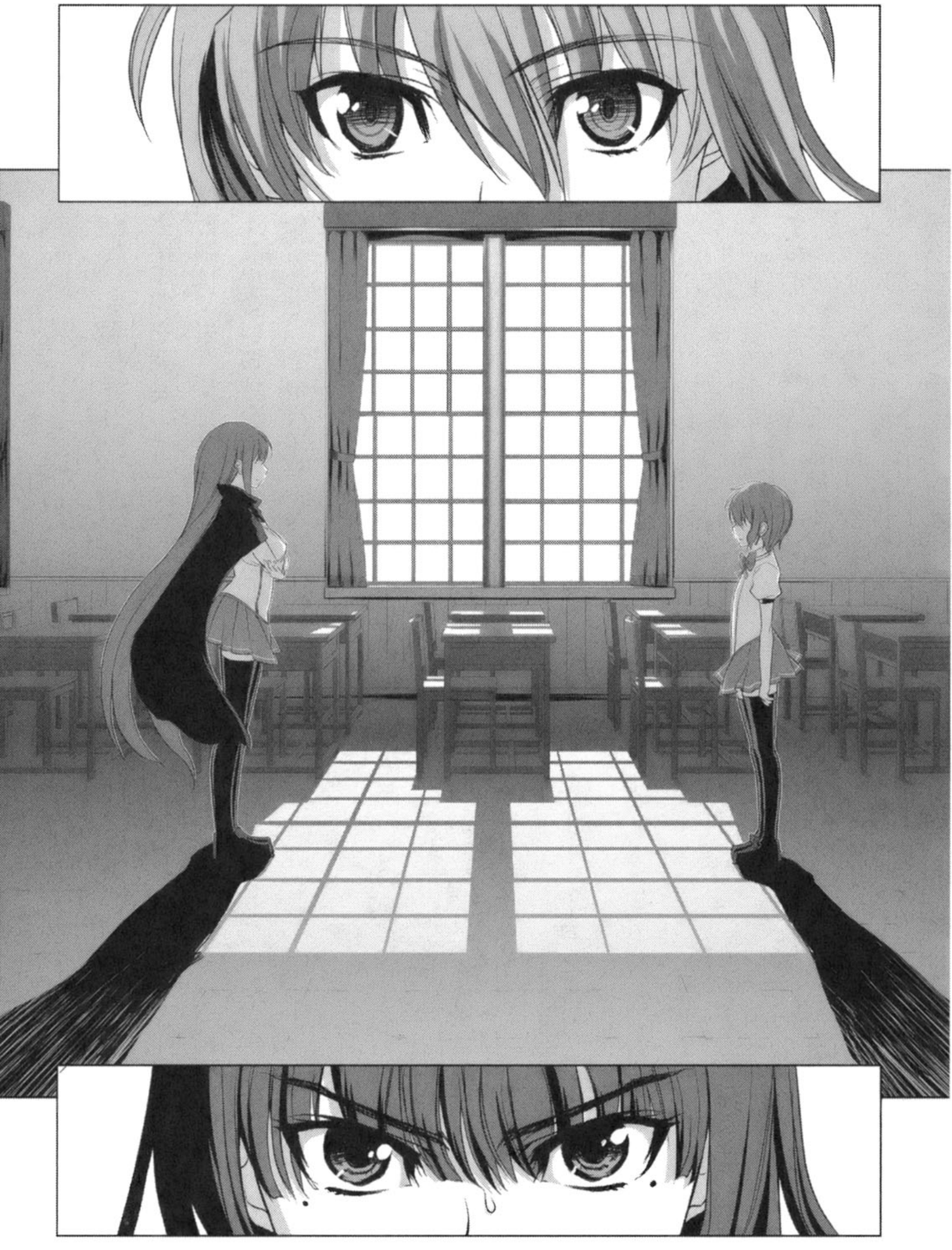
"Yes. That would increase the accuracy of my data."

"You wish to reference the actions of every imperial citizen to check on the data deviation between before and after the war, don't you? If you ask me, that is absurd."

Fujiko grinned.

"Exactly. I am glad you catch on so quickly," said Korone.

After the war, memories inconvenient to Akuto had disappeared from people's minds. Someone had erased the memories as they pleased. If there was a correlation between that and Keena Dorons's appearance…



"I hope you are planning to give me something in exchange," said Fujiko while grinning.

"I thought you would say that. You can have this."

Korone held out a bag of ningyou-yaki.

"I do not want that!"

Fujiko tried to brush aside the bag of ningyou-yaki, but Korone swiftly avoided her hand.

"I also thought you would say that. What I will actually do is overlook your crime of cultivating Sai Akuto's cells."

Fujiko's eyes opened wide.

"I see. You are the only person aware of that who would be able to cause a real problem for me. The logs related to the war were altered after all." Fujiko thought for a bit. "Understood. I accept. I will provide you with limited browsing permissions for accessing the data."

Fujiko opened her student handbook and displayed an address and password on the mana screen. Black magicians had not yet acquired fully open use of magic. They had several domains created in the gods' memory that they used to save life logs. They used primitive codes to exchange the passwords.

Korone's eyes lit up.

"I have accessed the data. I am adding the black magicians' data to my previous calculations. This will increase my accuracy from 90% to 99%."

A few seconds later, the light disappeared from Korone's eyes and she nodded in understanding.

"How did it go?"

"I had already hypothesized this, but now it is almost certain. Keena Dorons is a human created from the data distortion caused by the Law of Identity."

"Wow!"

Keena Dorons's eyes sparkled as she looked back and forth.

The bookshelves filling the vast library were much taller than her. They towered above her in orderly rows like buildings in a futuristic city from old SF.

"Sorry, but our work is over there."

Junko pointed toward a counter to the right of the entrance. Books had been placed in cluttered piles there. There were several hundred of them there. A cart with caster wheels was placed beside the counter and it was overflowing with cluttered piles of books as well. It had been left after someone brought the books in.

"Those poor books."

Keena walked over to the cart and made a pile on the counter using the books that had fallen off the cart.

"I don't really understand how you feel, but I agree that you should treat things with care."

Akuto began helping Keena.

However, it seemed Keena had not liked what he had said.

"You don't understand why I feel sorry for the books?"

"No, I mean books are not special. I of course think you should take care of your tools."

"That's not it! Books are special!"

Keena began swinging her arms around and passionately objecting, but she did not continue for long.

"I know that is how bibliophiles feel. I'm sorry, but I just don't have that same love for books. My dislike of them may come from people's obsession with stories being too similar to their obsession with the books some of those stories come in. It reminds me of people's belief and faith in the gods who are nothing but a system," explained Akuto.

Keena puffed out her cheeks.

"Don't make this so difficult! Fine! If you hate books, then go on hating them!"

"Sorry. I'll do my best to try to like them."

Akuto picked up a book.

During modern times, only books with elaborate binding were published. The book he randomly picked up had a wonderful leather cover that was dyed red. He flipped through the pages and listened to the rustling of the paper.

—I have to admit, this feels pretty nice. But I don't think Dorons-san knew about this when she fell in love with books.

As Akuto thought about that, someone struck him lightly on the head from behind.

"Do not read the books while sorting them. That should go without saying."

Junko held the spine of a book toward him.

"I suppose so. You'd never get anything done otherwise."

Akuto gave a bitter grin. He looked over at Keena, but she was already lost in reading a large volume sitting on her lap.

"Let's leave her be," said Akuto while smiling at Junko.

Junko gave an exaggerated shrug and smiled back.

"Then you had better do her share of the work."

"I will."

Akuto circled around the counter and checked on the scanner. The manual displayed on the screen said it could instantly scan the contents of a closed book.

"So we have to pass each book through the scanner to get its data."

"The digitized ones will give us a category number, so we just have to transfer them to the bookshelves. That is our job. The real work is moving the books to the bookshelves."

Junko smiled at Akuto.

"Then let's get to it."

Akuto moved out from behind the counter and switched places with Junko.

"She is a human created from the data distortion caused by the Law of Identity?"

"Yes. You may not believe it, but the Law of Identity has the ability to do such things."

Fujiko and Korone were on their way to the old library.

"Then can the Law of Identity create a new world?"

"Most likely. However, it appears she does not have the power needed to transform this entire world."

"Then we are in an extremely unstable position, aren't we?"

"There is no need to be so pessimistic. Humans have a sense of self as well as free will. Unless their life is physically destroyed in this world, no one's existence can be erased."

"In that case, what does it mean for someone to be a human created from the data distortion caused by the Law of Identity? Does her existence in this world cause any harm?"

"I believe she was born as a human in order to correct the distortion. Her existence itself causes no harm."

"Then why did you say we have to hurry to the old library?"

"It is possible the data alteration to truly correct the distortion is occurring."

"How exactly is this data alteration carried out?"

"A story that 'might have happened like that' will be completed in a virtual alternate dimension," explained Korone.

Fujiko stared back with a blank look.

"What does that mean…?"

"The world was altered in order to hide what Sai Akuto had done. The distortion created by this has taken human form. In other words, the distortion will disappear when she is satisfied."

"When Keena Dorons is satisfied?"

"It seems I do not have time to explain."

Korone stared off into the distance.

"What is it?"

"I have detected a mana fluctuation. The Law of Identity will soon make contact with the distortion. It seems the distortion is being corrected. I will be going on ahead."

Korone drew a transport circle in midair. She then dove into the circle.

"W-wait a second!"

Fujiko stretched out an arm, but Korone had already disappeared inside the circle.

"Please hurry to the library. Although I think you will only be able to watch on from outside."

"H-how irresponsible can you be?" complained Fujiko, but the transport circle had already disappeared from the hallway.

"A-chan, are you working hard?"

Soga Keena came floating into the old library. Her carefree expression made one horribly sleepy just by looking at it.

"Hard enough."

Akuto was standing on a tall ladder and holding several books. He was sorting the books on an empty shelf.

"Do you need any help?"

Akuto shook his head at Keena's offer.

"No thanks. Could you look after Dorons-san instead? She's been reading books this entire time, so she should be fine. Still, we can't keep an eye on her."

"Okay!"

Keena flew off toward the other Keena.

And Akuto continued sorting the books. He focused on his work for a while, but he turned around once more when he heard Soga Keena's voice.

She said something odd.

"Well? Have you decided on your favorite story?" she whispered to the blonde Keena.

Akuto was not close enough to hear a whisper, yet he had definitely heard her.

The blonde Keena sat atop a pile of books and had a green book open on her lap. The red-haired Keena placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Kee-…" began Akuto.

In that instant, the blonde Keena's lips moved as she said something.

As she did, her body gave off a brilliant light that filled Akuto's vision.

"Eh?"

Akuto sank into a white world. As he did, he thought he heard a shout from Junko and the emotionless voice of Korone.

"W-wait. What is going on?"

"It looks like I made it in time. No. Perhaps I should say I managed to be caught up in the middle of it."

In the next instant, Akuto lost consciousness.

When he came to, he was wearing a luxurious frock coat.

"Hm?"

Akuto wondered if Fujiko had put it on him, but that was most likely not the case.

He was in a Western-style bedroom. It contained a rococo dresser and large bed with a canopy. His feet sank into a deep carpet.

"What is going on?"

He focused on his surroundings. The room was large, but he was the only person standing within it.

However, someone was sleeping in the bed. It was Keena Dorons.

"She was reading that book… I guess I should wake her."

Akuto walked over to the bed and stopped in surprise.

Keena did not seem to be wearing anything. Only a thin sheet covered her body. The lines of her body came through all too well.

"Is this an illusion?" he muttered.

He heard a knock and the door opened.

"Excuse me. I know this is an odd thing to say after suddenly entering, but this is not an illusion."

Korone walked in. She wore a maid uniform.

"Korone… Why are you dressed like that? And I take it you understand what is going on here."

Korone nodded.

"I will explain it all from the beginning."

Korone explained that Keena Dorons was a human created from the data distortion caused by the Law of Identity and that she was an existence meant to correct that distortion.

"We were sent here to correct the distortion?"

"This is a virtual alternate dimension. The dimension itself is what we normally use for magical transfers, but it has been altered a bit."

"How has it been altered?"

"We are closed in so we cannot leave. And the dimension has been designed based on the book Keena Dorons was reading."

"The book she was reading?"

Akuto looked around again. They appeared to be in a European noble's mansion.

"It was a literary work illustrating various love stories of a European noble during the 1900s. It was written as an entertainment novel, but appreciation of it grew in a later era. It is now studied as a literary work."

"I see. So to put it simply, we've been trapped in the world of that story?"

"Yes. And that is heavily related to Keena Dorons."

"In what way?"

"She is the distortion in the world. Her disappearance will stabilize the world and free us from this virtual alternate dimension."

"W-wait a second. You mean she… You mean Dorons-san will die?"

Akuto looked over at Keena as she slept. The expression on her face was one of pure happiness. Akuto had never seen someone look more satisfied as they slept.

"Figuratively, yes. However, it will be nothing more than a distortion disappearing," explained Korone calmly.

"You aren't going to tell me to kill her, are you?" asked Akuto worriedly.

"No, I will not. I will tell you to make her disappear. However, she will disappear on her own eventually. That is her duty. That is what she was born to do."

Korone nodded.

—She was born to disappear?

Akuto was conflicted. This meant Keena Dorons had been born in order to save him and she would disappear in order to save him.

"I'm not sure I can do that…"

"Do not worry. The distortion will disappear on its own, so she will receive something suitable in return."

"I'm not sure what you mean," said Akuto.

Korone paused for a moment before explaining.

"The distortion is also people's memories. If those memories are satisfied… That is, if she is satisfied, she will disappear."

—She is people's memories? And if she is satisfied…

Akuto felt as if he had glimpsed the truth of the world that Bouichirou had spoken of back then. If the world was thoroughly inspected, one would find parts that did not add up. And a truly alternate world existed outside of this one that was apparently closely related to the destruction of the world.

"The Law of Identity is regulating this world?"

"How very perceptive of you. However, that does not directly mean this world does not exist. We exist here and we are alive."

"But she is a human, too…"

Akuto looked over at Keena once more.

"Yes, but you can also say this: in this world, humans are supported by the memories of others. No, it is too soon to come to a conclusion. At the very least, no one in this world can prove you are something that only exists in memories, so it is only natural to think you are real."

Korone was an artificial human, so she could speak such frightening theories with absolute calm. However, Akuto was different. He trembled a bit.

"That's scary. But we were born and we are alive. Is that what's important?"

"Yes. The difference for Keena Dorons is that she suddenly became alive. Do not forget that. All of the above is based on a massive number of calculations. It is the truth to a high degree of accuracy."

Akuto let out a breath when he heard that.

"So how do we satisfy her?"

"That is an issue of human emotion, but I can make some predictions based on the patterns of emotions. If we measure the memories based on emotions, the memories are nothing more than a story. That story must be completed. And in a way she will enjoy," said Korone.

—That means…

"I see. We just have to act according to the novel. I'm not a good actor, but I'll just have to do my best."

That was how Akuto interpreted it.

Korone nodded.

"Exactly. But Keena Dorons's satisfaction is what matters, so there is no need to act it out all that perfectly. However, I expect anything that does not exist in the text will not exist in this virtual alternate dimension."

"That's a simple rule."

"There should not be too many problems. The novel is a peaceful one in which we need not worry about dying. We should be able to enjoy acting it out."

"That's good."

Akuto's mood brightened a bit.

But what Korone said next caused him to suddenly pale.

"It will be quite enjoyable. After all, it tells of the love stories of a European noble. He becomes known for having affairs with many different women and finally enters into a relationship with the count's daughter."

Korone pointed at Keena.

"Eh? I'm the European noble?"

<Oh, honestly! I'm so late!>

Akuto heard a voice from above.

"Eh? What? What?"

He looked around, but there was no one there. He could tell the voice belonged to Fujiko, but she was nowhere to be found.

"Senpai? Where are you?"

"A novel also has the narrative representing the author's point of view. Etou Fujiko arrived late, so she will be playing that role," said Korone.

<Wait. Why are there voices coming from this book?>

"Look at that book. We are inside it. Your duty is to check the text and guide us to the end of the story," explained Korone.

Korone continued explaining, but Fujiko caught on quickly due to the conversation they had had earlier.

<Ahh! If I had been a little sooner, I could have been in a relationship with Akuto-sama!>

"Even if you made it into the story, you would have been nothing more than the heroine's cruel older sister. Please give up and focus on progressing the story," said Korone coolly.

<You are only the maid!>

"Oh? Are you not aware that nobles would have affairs with their maids? Heh heh heh heh heh."

Korone's laugh was plain, but it held an odd sense of intimidation.

Akuto was at a complete loss as to what to do.

"W-wait. Let's stop this."

"If we stop, there is no way to return. We must complete the story."

<Ahh! I will not allow you to do this with Akuto-sama!>

"It does not matter what you will allow. After all, the noble protagonist has an affair with all of the female characters."

"W-wait! You're kidding, right?"

Akuto panicked, but Korone did not respond.

"Now, it is time for the opening. Sai Akuto the noble meets Keena Dorons!"

Korone pointed into empty space.

Act 1

"I meet her? But I've already met her."

Akuto stood confused in the bedroom. Korone was not in this scene, so she left. To start with, Akuto did not know why he was in that room.

<The protagonist walked into the wrong room after drinking until morning at a party in the count's residence!>

Fujiko's irritated voice descended from above.

"I see… Then I guess I should be staggering. Um… I am so drunk…"

<Isn't that acting a little too bad?>

"How should I know!? I'm not a professional," complained Akuto.

Keena suddenly sat up from where she had been happily sleeping.

"Who are you? What are you doing in my bedroom!? Kyah! How rude! Get out! I will call for someone!"

Keena had already read the book, so her acting was perfect. In fact, she may not have been aware she was acting.

When faced with that realistic acting, Akuto accidentally returned to his true self.

"My apologies! I had no intention of frightening you. It's just…I was charmed by how lovely your face looked as you slept."

<Akuto-sama… That was not acting, was it? Then why did it match the protagonist's line down to the letter?>

"…Are you serious?"

Akuto could not help but fall into self-loathing. However, the story continued before he could get too depressed.

"Such frivolous speech! You are no proper man!"

Keena hurriedly covered her exposed chest and spoke harshly.

"I may be a frivolous man, but I was not lying. Now, if you will excuse me, the night is not yet over. You need to get back to sleep."

Akuto hurried out of the room.

And he spoke worriedly to some unknown area above him.

"Senpai, was that good?"

<It was perfect. Are you sure you did not read this book beforehand?>

"Qu-quite sure…"

As he stood confused in the hallway, someone spoke to him from behind.

"B-b-b-brother…"

This person's voice was incredibly nervous.

Akuto turned around in surprise and then stared dumbfounded. He found Junko standing in a gorgeous dress.

"Brother?"

Akuto was surprised by how different this was from how she usually dressed. He also did not know where to look. The chest of her dress was cut very low and her breasts were pushed up by the corset she wore below.

"Y-you idiot! What is with that look in your eyes!?"

Junko tried to hit Akuto, but Fujiko stopped her.

<Stop! The two of you are siblings! Hattori-san, you already established that, remember?>

"B-but, senpai… I am not used to wearing this kind of clothing…and this outfit is indecent…"

<Do not complain to me! If it bothers you that much, why not swap places with me! I will show you how to properly wear a dress like that!>

Fujiko sounded angry.

"C-calm down, senpai. Let's put up with this and advance the story," said Akuto timidly before Fujiko loudly interrupted him.

<You wrap your arm around her shoulders like lovers and exit!>

"L-like lovers? But we're siblings."

<Do not complain to me! It seems that is the kind of siblings you are!>

"H-how indecent is this story?"

Junko blushed and began to tremble, but she still leaned up against Akuto's shoulder.

"W-wait, Hattori-san…"

"Call me Junko. I am your younger sister."

"B-but…Okay, J-Junko…"

Akuto was flustered, but Junko pressed herself up against him even further.

"W-we need to walk. We have no other choice if we are to advance the story. We have no other choice…"

Even as she made that excuse, a hint of satisfaction appeared on Junko's face.

<Ah! You just thought of a way to benefit from this, didn't you!?>

"You are not even a character in this, so keep quiet. W-wrap your arm around my shoulder…brother."

"Y-you won't hit me…will you?"

Akuto placed a hand on Junko's shoulder. And once he did, he realized the dress did not cover her shoulders. He was touching her bare skin.

"Ah…S-sorry."

"Y-you idiot! Who would apologize for that?" said Junko as she placed her own hand over Akuto's.

<I-I need to find a way inside there!>

"K-keep quiet out there."

Junko urged Akuto to begin walking.

As they walked off, Keena Dorons's head was peering out from her bedroom door.

"H-he has a lover… No, that means nothing to me."

Keena did a splendid job of showing a wavering heart.

<Okay! This scene is complete! Get away from each other!>

Fujiko's desperate shout reverberated through the hallway.

Act 2

<The two meet each other again by coincidence. Let's see… Akuto-sama witnesses an evil deed of Keena's father, the count, so he is being pursued by the count's men. During his flight, he hides in…in Keena's skirt?>

Fujiko sounded hysteric.

"Wait, wait. I can't do that… And what kind of literature is this?"

Akuto was confused as well.

<Akuto-sama, I hate to say it, but there are actually several splendid works of literature with scenes of hiding inside skirts.>

"I-I see…"

<However, that does not mean you should just-…Oh, it is starting!>

As Fujiko shouted, three men wielding swords approached Akuto.

"Wah!"

Akuto frantically ran away.

He knew where he had to run to, but he could not help but complain because he wanted to avoid going there.

"C-can't I just blow them away with magic?"

"No, you cannot. It is against the rules and you cannot use magic here anyway," explained a maid who happened to be passing by.

"You certainly appeared out of nowhere, Korone… Oh, I get it. A maid does not look unnatural in any scene within the estate."

Akuto was impressed, but it did not improve his situation. As he fled, he made his way to Keena's room where she was wearing a dress.

"Wah!"

"Kyah!"

"Shh. I am being chased. Um…Is there anywhere I could hide? Preferably a very normal hiding spot."

Akuto altered his lines to avoid hiding in the skirt, but he was powerless in front of Keena who wanted to complete the story.

"Th-there is nowhere to hide in this room. N-no, wait. There is one place!"

Keena blushed and she lifted up the skirt of her dress and the petticoat underneath. This exposed her healthy legs and her panties.

"Wah!"

Akuto averted his gaze. However, Keena did not lower her skirt and the footsteps of his pursuers drew near.

"W-wait. What am I supposed to do?"

Akuto was frozen in place.

And…

"Wham!"

A maid who happened to be passing by shoved Akuto forward. He fell down and rolled into Keena's skirt.

She lowered her skirt and it completely covered Akuto.

"Milady, did you see an intruder around here?"

"He went that way."

After that short conversation, the footsteps grew more distant.

"Whew."

It was too dark to see anything, but Akuto still had his eyes squeezed shut. Relieved that it was safe, he tried to come out, but something soft held him in place. He quickly realized that "something" was Keena's thighs.

He could feel Keena's body heat over his entire body.

"W-wait!"

Akuto struggled.

"Ah! Please get out of there!" screamed Keena.

"Get out? I'm the one that wants to…"

Akuto trailed off as a fist struck his head through the skirt. Once he realized what that meant, Akuto cleared his throat and delivered his line.

"U-um… Excuse me. I…I am concerned that I am still being pursued. It is possible you have deceived me."

"Oh, my. Not only are you cowardly, but you are rude as well. How could you doubt the courage I showed in lifting my skirt!?"

After giving her part of the performance, Keena loosened her thighs and lifted up her skirt.

Akuto stood up. He was unable to look her straight in the face. However, Keena held his cheeks between her hands and forced him to look at her.

"This is the second time you have been rude to me," said Keena angrily before sticking her tongue out mischievously.

—I see. She isn't completely lost in this. She knows it's all an act.

Keena's expression was actually quite lively. She must have been truly enjoying this make-believe.

"And I will apologize as many times as it takes. You are both brave and beautiful."

Akuto played his part and winked at Keena.

She smiled happily, but her tone of voice remained angry.

"Do you mean you plan to see me naked again? You are both cowardly and covered in dust."

Keena and Akuto smiled at each other.

<Ah! Is it just me or are they creating a really nice mood?>

"I am just a maid who happens to be passing by, but it is the elder person's duty to forgive small things like this. Now, on to Act 3!"

Act 3

<Umm, the two continue their pure relationship involving a hint of romance. However, Akuto-sama casually enters into sexual relationships with women he does not love. Eh? Wait! This is filled with sex scenes!>

Fujiko started to panic.

"I am just a maid who happens to be passing by, but I will be attacked from behind while I change the flowers in this vase."

Korone placed both hands on a vase on a table while sticking out her hips.

"Now do it!"

"Don't say that…"

Akuto actually flinched back this time.

"But if you do not attack me, the story will not continue."

Korone moved her hips seductively.

"Please stop doing that with that expressionless look on your face…"

"The text says nothing about the maid's expression."

"Of course not. Why would it? …Wait, senpai! How exactly is this scene described?"

A good idea had clearly come to Akuto.

<How exactly…? Do you want me to read it? Um…It says you attack her from behind like a wild beast and fiercely satisfy your desires.>

"In that case…!"

Akuto then attacked Korone's backside with fierce intensity.

"Ahh, stop. Please stop."

"Take this! And this!"

"Ahh, how cruel. My ass… How could you hit me on the ass?" said Korone disinterestedly.

Akuto was spanking Korone.

"Will this fiercely satisfy your desires?" asked Korone.

Akuto nodded.

"Your selfishness sometimes makes me angry."

"Ah…Ow. Master, stop! It's my first time!"

<Well, I suppose that is one way around it. Okay… Next is the scene with your sister.>

"I-I have a bad feeling about this. What does it say?"

<You enter the bed with her without any clothes on and grope each other. You stick your finger into Junko's pink flower bud, but the petals are already quite wet. She then guides you inside and moans as you enter her. …Wait, what are you making me say!?>

"This is one hell of a piece of literature…"

"It was released as an entertainment novel."

"W-wait a minute! It jumps to that when it is my turn!?"

Junko's face was already quite red and she was preparing to hit Akuto.

<I-I would sleep with him without hesitation! This is the problem with you innocent girls! Ho ho ho.>

Fujiko seemed quite composed for how much she had blushed while describing the passage.

"No, let's think up a way out of this."

Akuto began thinking with a serious expression.

"Y-you do not need to think that hard… A-as long as we find a way around the 'guiding you inside' part, I will allow you to go…rather far. I-If all you do is touch…"

Junko spoke quietly with her head hanging down, but Akuto did not hear her.

"I've got it. We might be able to get around it like this!"

"Th-there is no way around getting in the bed together naked, is there?"

After clearing everyone else from the room, Junko climbed into the bed and stripped off her clothes underneath the blanket. A thick negligee slid off the side of the bed.

Akuto turned away and answered Junko.

"No. This can't be helped, but I'll do my best not to touch you. I'm coming in."

Akuto then climbed into the bed on the opposite side from Junko.

"Y-your legs touched me a bit. And you did not see me when you flipped up the blanket, did you?"

"D-don't worry. You have your back turned, so all I would see is your back and I'm used to seeing that."

"You idiot! You do not have to say that!" yelled Junko angrily.

"S-sorry…"

Akuto apologized and quickly removed his clothes under the blanket.

The bed was large, but his hands still ended up touching Junko's back as he stripped. He ended up gently stroking up the center of her back.

"Pyah!" she cried and arched her back.

She quickly balled up and began trembling.

"Oh, sorry. Did it tickle?"

In his desire to apologize, Akuto reflexively held a hand out toward her. This time, his hand stroked her waist.

"Hyahhh!"

Junko twisted her body around.

"S-sorry. I guess it does tickle…"

"Th-that is not…it… Just stay still," insisted Junko while trying to catch her breath.

"Oh. S-sorry."

Akuto lowered his head because he did not understand.

After a moment, Junko spoke in a trembling voice.

"O-okay. Let's do this."

"Right."

The two of them gulped.

Akuto reached a hand out toward Junko.

Junko squeezed her eyes shut and turned toward Akuto.

And…

"Uuh… This is pathetic. Even though this is all we are doing… No, because this is all we are doing, I feel like I am losing something important as a girl…"

"Yeah. It feels somehow pathetic to me too."

The two of them had their shoulders sticking out from the blanket. They reached over and groped at each other's hair. Akuto then poked his finger into the rose bud they had prepared ahead of time.

"It's a good thing we had the scene with the flowers in the vase earlier."

"Are the petals nice and wet?"

"I suppose…"

Akuto pinched the rose bud between his fingers and stuck a finger in between the petals.

"Even doing this feels really inappropriate," groaned Junko as she watched the motion of Akuto's finger.

"Let's get this over with. Okay. You have to guide my finger into your ear. Don't forget to moan."

Akuto stuck his pinky finger in Junko's ear.

"Hyah! Uuh…This is horrible… This is more humiliating then doing it for real… Uuh…uuh…"

It was mostly due to humiliation, but she was certainly moaning.

And then the door to the bedroom opened.

"Akuto-sama, as promised… Wait, what are you doing!? Pfhh! Ah ha ha ha! Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

Keena began laughing as she burst into the room.

"Um, you aren't supposed to be laughing here," warned Akuto and Keena suppressed her laughter.

"R-right. Um, I cannot believe you, Akuto-sama! How indecent!"

"P-please wait, Keena! She is only…"

"No, you knew how I felt! I will tell father of this betrayal!"

Keena ran away.

"Wait…"

Akuto reached out toward the door and sat up. As he did, the blanket flipped up and exposed Junko's body.

"Y-you idiot! Th-the blanket!"

"Ah! Sorry…"

As Akuto frantically fixed the blanket, his hand touched Junko's waist.

"Pyaaah!"

<Ah! I am so jealous! If it means having Akuto-sama touch you so familiarly, next time I will-…!>

"Actually, I think we have witnessed the birth of a machine that will continue touching girls' erogenous zones for all eternity if no outside force stops it."

Korone entered the room as she cut off Fujiko.

"Now, cover yourself with this towel and put on your clothes. It is time for the next scene."

<In the next scene, Akuto-sama is worrying over which girl to choose.>

"Um? Between my sister, the maid, and the count's daughter?" asked Akuto as he dressed.

<Yes. However, you decide to give up on the maid and you learn from her that you are not blood related to your sister. That is how the story goes.>

"Everyone but the noble is to leave the room. Act 4 is about to begin!"

Korone once more pointed into empty space.

Act 4

"The truth is, the two of you are not blood related. Your family took in your sister at a young age when her noble family fell on hard times," said Korone in a perfect monotone.

"So that is why we were so attracted to each other. This means I must choose one of the two!" said Akuto as he delivered his line.

Akuto knew little about acting, but he could still feel the weight of this line. And so…

"Do I really have to choose someone here?" he whispered to Korone.

"What do you mean? Do you wish to choose everyone? It is not too late to redo the scene now. Or do you wish to choose no one? The story will never advance if you do that."

"That's what I mean. I don't want the story to advance," said Akuto.

Korone shook her head.

"You must choose, master. That is the responsibility you have to those women."

That was obviously a line from the novel, but Akuto shook his head.

"I know I have a responsibility, but won't the story end even if I choose my sister?"

"Are you saying you will change the story and give it a different ending?"

"Yes. Would this virtual alternate dimension close if I did that?"

Korone shook her head.

"I doubt that would satisfy Keena Dorons."

"But if she is satisfied, she'll disappear, right?"

"Yes. She is a distortion, so that is only natural," replied Korone coldheartedly.

"She is a human," said Akuto with a hint of displeasure.

And Korone answered without the slightest hesitation.

"Are you saying her disappearance would not be a problem if she were a L'Isle-Adam?"

"Please do not be so disagreeable. Of course I don't want you to disappear."

"In that case, I wish you would have slept with me instead of spanking me…"

Korone's jokes usually had an effect, but Akuto did not respond this time.

"That isn't what I mean. I was thinking it wouldn't be all that bad if we didn't satisfy her and stayed trapped here in this dimension."

"Even if that was possible, you are wrong if you think that is in her best interest."

"Eh?"

"Whether in this virtual alternate dimension or not, she will disappear soon. And if she is in here, it will likely end without her experiencing anything she truly wanted."

"No…"

"In the end, this is all you can do for her. Tell her you love her, even if it is just an act. The rest of us will allow it just this once."

"Why do I need your permission? But I guess that is all I can do. Understood. I will choose her. I will choose Keena Dorons."

Akuto gave a nod.

And the final scene of action and romance began.

Keena was imprisoned in the tower while the count committed further evil. However, Akuto used splendid swordplay to corner the count and defeat him.

Akuto's actions had been just, but the fact that he had killed her father weighed heavily on Keena. Also, one of the count's subordinates destroyed the evidence and persistently pursued Akuto so he could take over the count's position.

Just as it seemed Akuto would be killed, Keena awoke to her love and saved him.

"Akuto-sama! Stab your sword into the crack in that stone! That will cause the tower to crumble!"

"But Keena! It will collapse with you inside!"

"That is fine! I do not care what happens to me as long as you survive!"

Keena was resolute.

Akuto stabbed the sword into the stone.

With a great rumble, the tower crumbled. And with Keena inside.

However, Akuto rushed up the tower even as it crumbled. He embraced Keena and leapt out into the air.

"Akuto-sama!"

"Keena!"

Keena's joyous expression shined in the morning sun. They stood alone on the cliff the tower had stood on. As they stared at each other, no one came to interfere.

"Ah…Ah ha ha! Ah ha ha! That was fun. Really, really fun," said Keena as she laughed.

"It was. I never liked this kind of hackneyed story, but I might need to rethink my opinion on that," said Akuto as he caught his breath.

"I was…looking only at you," said Keena in a serious tone of voice.

—That's right. All stories have an ending.

Akuto did not know if Keena's words were from the novel or from her heart.

"In this kind of story…it may be rude to say it, but…"

Akuto trailed off as Keena placed a finger over his lips.

"I know that you are rude."

"Yes… It seems I am. I…"

Akuto started to say something again, but Keena shook her head.

"It's fine. I was born for your sake and I will disappear in your arms. That is destiny. Right?"

"Destiny…?"

"No, I know. I alone am a person from within a story. I was different from the rest of you from the beginning. It was only for a short time, but you gave me everything I wanted."

"I didn't do anything! The time we spent together was so short! We didn't even have time to really get to know each other."

"No, you gave me everything. The story is complete. This is the end."

"But why do you and you alone have to disappear?"

"Real humans must not live within a story. However, I am allowed to live within a story. That is the difference. I am not disappearing. I alone will

remain in eternal happiness. And it is all because you gave me that happiness."

"But I can't stand this. It's my fault. It's all because I asked the Law of Identity for my own freedom…"

"A story is a short dream. You must not live within a novel."

"But surely I can-…"

"Do not be sad. Once the story comes to an end, we will have eternal happiness."

Keena wrapped her arms around Akuto's neck.

Their lips drew near.

However, Akuto never felt her soft lips on his own. Instead, warm tears flowed onto his cheek. He did not know if they were Keena's tears or his own.

There was no longer anyone in his arms.

—A-ahh…

He turned around and found Korone and Junko standing there.

"She has gone somewhere else," said Akuto.

The next thing he knew, he was lying on the floor of the old library.

—Hm? What? What happened?

Akuto sat up. Junko lay unconscious to his right, Korone to his left, and Fujiko behind him.

—Oh. We were sorting the books as a punishment and a pile collapsed on us.

And Soga Keena was in his arms. She sat on Akuto as if straddling him while she looked at him with sleepy eyes devoid of any malice.

"A-chan, good morning."

"Good morning… What happened?"

Akuto rubbed Keena's head as he tried to call back some half-remembered thought in the back of his mind.

"Nothing happened," said Keena.

She simply stared at Akuto with her wide, round eyes.

"Okay. If you say so, that must be the case. Hey, why is it you sometimes look really cruel?" asked Akuto.

Keena blinked at him as if she did not understand.

"Cruel? I'm not cruel. But A-chan, you only get to cheat on me this one time," she said before embracing him.

"Cheat on you? What do you mean? I haven't cheated on you. For one thing, we're not going out."

Keena pushed Akuto to the ground.

That sound awoke Junko.

"Hm? I feel like I just had a horrible nightmare… Wait, what are you two doing!?"

"Ahhh! I came here because I was worried, Akuto-sama! And just as I feared, that girl is clinging to you again!"

"Who was it that pulled off the trick of knocking a L'Isle-Adam unconscious?"

"Oh, everyone's awake! Hey, it was amazing! The books all came tumbling down! They made a huge boom!" exclaimed Keena as she spread her arms wide.

For a while afterwards, Akuto lived his everyday life with a nagging feeling that he was forgetting something.

That feeling gradually vanished, but he had gained a new habit. He began picking up paper books and reading some of the stories inside.

And whenever he flipped through the pages of those paper books, he felt some kind of emotion squeezing at his chest. For some reason, that feeling was always strongest when he read a story with a happy ending.

"What am I trying to find in these stories?"

As he muttered that question to no one in particular, the wind flipped through the pages as if trying to answer his question.

Chapter 4: An Afternoon of Playing with Dolls

A girl sat within a room filled with the non-autonomous L'Isle-Adams known as dolls.

She was only about 10 years old, but that room was clearly too bizarre for a child of her age. Dozens of mana screens were open. They were the only things in the room other than the dolls.

It was not a very amusing room.

"There is little amusement in a work of literature you have already thoroughly analyzed. Ha ha."

The girl spoke into one of the mana screens. That screen displayed a doll. From the shape of the room, the arrangement of the table, and the other men visible on the screen, it seemed the doll was taking part in a meeting.

And the next screen over was clearly showing what that doll could see.

This girl was the person who went by the codename 2V. She had belonged to the Cabinet Intelligence and Magic Office underneath Bouichirou and was currently working to gain control of that office. She could control dozens of dolls simultaneously and was a specialist at spying. Not even the other expert investigators belonging to CIMO 8 had seen her true face.

<Enough about literature. What does that have to do with our meeting?> asked one of the men in irritation.

"My bad. Don't get so mad. It has a lot to do with the meeting. I have witnessed a ground-breaking method of using the virtual alternate dimension."

2V displayed yet another screen. It showed footage of Constant Magic Academy's old library. A few of the students there were dolls.

<The virtual alternate dimension? That dimension used to magically transfer objects and used to defend the devices of the gods?>

"Generally, the virtual alternate dimension has nothing in it. Of course, anything brought into it can be arranged as you see fit. That is why killing someone inside one or luring people inside to start a war is an inefficient method except for using it as a defense system."

2V's speech did not match her young age. It was possible she was not the age she appeared to be.

<And?>

"It seems the demon king's wavelength…no, it is actually the wavelength created when the Law of Identity and the demon king's mana waves resonate. At any rate, that wavelength seems able to influence the virtual alternate dimension. So if you abduct the Law of Identity, you can bring a concept such as a video or a story into the virtual alternate dimension."

<I'm not sure I understand…>

"I can leave the details of the theory until later. To put it simply, you can enter inside a movie or video game."

<And that's why you brought up literature? Wait, but we were discussing a strategy…>

"Hah hah! You still don't get it? We can create a field where we write the rules. And when the demon king steps inside it…he is a simple human."

2V's words – or more accurately, 2V's dolls words – sent excitement running through the meeting room.

<So that's it! Then we can kill him.>

<We won't have to worry about another god falling victim to him!>

<We can restore order. This will allow us to suppress the expansion of the demon king worshipers.>

"Exactly. I would like to make a draft of a plan."

2V promised to submit a plan a week later and the doll left the meeting room.

"Now then. Abducting the Law of Identity won't be easy, but I could always handle it myself. At any rate, those cells of Sai Akuto's that Rubbers brought back should come in handy."

2V rolled up the sleeves of her plain white shirt, crossed her legs which wore gray slacks, and turned toward a different mana screen.

Afterword

Thank you once again. This is Mizuki Shoutarou.

Here is the sixth volume. This story is a small rest in the middle. But from the comedy side of things, this type of story is the proper course for this series. I have a feeling the initial standard set for this series was to continually put out novels like this.

But even if this was meant as a rest, I feel that its theme touched on some oddly important issues. I should have realized this earlier, but when writing a story however you want it, it's important to take it easy. You might want to ask if that means I have been writing all this series without giving it much thought, but try to restrain yourself.

Oh, and even if this is the sixth volume, I made it so it can be read starting here. If you just so happened to pick this one up, feel free to read it.

Now I will introduce how the series is expanding into other media.

A drama CD was released by Beatniks Inc. on February 25, 2009. A sequel might be released as well, so please check it out.

Also, the first volume of Itou-san's manga version has been released by Akita Shoten. Some bookstores might place it next to this book, so please buy them together.

And now for my thanks.

First, my illustrator Itou Souichi-san. I included a lot of scenes that appealed to many different tastes, but his illustrations exceeded my expectations. I couldn't help but grin when I saw them. Oh, and congratulations on your move. I will stop by to visit some time.

Next, my editor Ohashi-san. I think I have settled into the position of a constantly late author, but I am doing my best to speed myself up. Please stick with me next time as well.

Lastly, I give my thanks to everyone involved with the drama CD and everything else. You have helped me out so much.

Now, next up is the seventh volume. It will have a new story development. It looks like we can enjoy this for quite a while longer!

References

1. ↑ Japanese for rice.
2. ↑ Vermeer is written as Fermeer in Japanese.
3. ↑ A performance in which the performer dances with their entire body coated in gold dust

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